



Boys & Dancing: Helpful Resources for BCA Boys Who Dance and Their Moms & Dads

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Boys & Dancing at BCA

BCA offers boys ages 7 and up a robust program of dance including Boys ballet class, regular ballet class, modern, jazz, and tap. We make every attempt to keep our boys together so they can build important bonds between themselves and their teachers. Boys with a serious interest in ballet are also encouraged to learn more about our Pre-Professional program. Our experience has shown that well-trained boys are often offered full scholarships to many of the finest summer intensive programs. In addition, boys that complete our Pre-Professional program should be presented with a wide variety of opportunities at the college and professional level.

In the following pages, we've pulled together some resources that can help moms and dads of BCA male dancers become familiar with the opportunities and challenges that are presented to boys dancing. Enjoy!

Go BCA Boys!

Suite 101: Benefits of Dance Class for Boys

Jan 14, 2011 Adrienne Warber

Dance class benefits growing boys and may be one of the secrets to successful athletic performance in many sports.

All children can get valuable exercise, flexibility, endurance and motor skill growth from dancing. Boys also need the lessons in fitness and discipline that are a part of dance. Discover how dancing can help young boys grow into strong young men.

Should a Boy Take Dance Class?

Dance class is not just for girls. More boys are taking dance class than ever before. You may feel pressured by relatives who view dancing as effeminate and want to steer your son in the direction of typical male dominant activities like basketball and karate. However, if your son is interested in dance or you feel he would enjoy it, consider enrolling him. Dancing actually builds great strength and endurance. The exercise and principles of dance can help your son perform better in all areas of his life from athletics to academics.

Dance Class Benefits for Boys

Dance is art, exercise and sport all in one. Boys can get the following benefits from taking a dance class:

- **Gross motor skill development:** According to a 2004 Queens College study, preschool dance classes help develop gross motor skills.
- **Self-expression:** A boy learns to express himself through movement to music.
- **Total body workout:** Dance provides a complete workout and can help prevent childhood obesity.
- **Improves balance:** Dancing helps a boy improve his balance which can help with other sports.
- **Gain greater flexibility:** A boy will gain a healthy flexibility which may also help in other sports as well as helping general mobility.
- **Learn to move in continuous fluid movement:** Dancing teaches a boy to move in continuous fluid movement which can help in sports like football.
- **Better coordination:** A boy will gain greater coordination skills.
- **Builds strength and endurance:** Some of the strongest dancers are male ballet dancers who gain a great deal of total body muscular strength from ballet techniques. All dancing helps build strength and teaches students endurance as they learn more complex dance techniques that work the muscles harder.
- **Becomes a team player:** A boy learns how to work as a part of a team when he dances in a group.
- **Better posture and deportment:** A boy will learn how to stand up straight and move with masculine grace because dancing requires strict body alignment for correct form, which is also healthier for the body.

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- **Increases self-confidence:** A boy can gain greater self-confidence as he gets stronger and grows as a dancer by accomplishing difficult dance moves.
- **Requires discipline and focus:** Dance class requires focus on the teacher's instructions to learn dance moves and the discipline to practice until a student learns the lesson correctly. This discipline can help boys with attention deficit disorder improve the ability to focus and pay attention. The discipline learned in dance class can also help boys focus better on academics and build better study skills for school.
- **Music appreciation:** A boy can gain a greater appreciation for music by participating in a dance class.
- **Provides a sense of accomplishment:** When a boy masters a dance routine, he feels great sense of accomplishment.
- **Appreciation for physical fitness:** A boy involved in dance will be more aware of the importance of physical fitness and is more likely to exercise regularly.

Choosing the Right Dance Class for a Boy

Choosing the right dance class for a boy is important for success. Here are some tips for finding the best dance class for your son:

- **Enroll the child in an all boy dance classes:** Since many dance classes are still female dominated, your young son may feel more comfortable in all boy classes or classes with a more equal rate of male and female students. Placing a preschool boy in an all girls' dance class can sometimes be a little scary to him or even off putting.
- **Make sure your son is not the only boy:** You don't want your son to be the dance studio's first male student. Take a dance class where they are use to teaching both boys and girls.
- **Ask the school about teaching technique for boys:** Finding out how a dance school approaches dance and treats male students can help you figure out if it is the right place for your son.
- **Observe a class:** Take your son with you and observe a dance class before signing up for one. Observing a class can help you see how the teacher interacts with students and if your son would be comfortable. Some dance studios even offer free trial classes so your son could participate in the trial class before you enroll.
- **Consider the type of dance:** What type of dance would most interest your son? If he is starting at preschool or kindergarten age, he will often be placed in a mini movement class the combines tap and ballet techniques. Some dance studios offer jazz and hip hop classes to the very young but many offer this to elementary school age children and older, many of whom have already completed a mini movement combination class.

With a little research, you can find a good dance class for your son. If your son would enjoy dance, consider enrolling him in a class because dance will teach him skills that can help him succeed in other sports as well as academics.

Sources:

National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) site

Goodwin, Joy, "Keeping That Big Nutcracker Party Coed," The New York Times, August 19, 2007

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<http://adrienne-warber.suite101.com/benefits-of-dance-class-for-boys-a332716>

Dance Teacher Magazine: Keeping Boys At Your Studio

By Nina Amir

Here's how to give your young men the support and attention to keep them coming back

Many male dancers have been laughed at for going to the dance studio rather than the football field, teased for wearing tights onstage or otherwise struggled with the feminine stereotypes associated with dance, ballet in particular. As the parent of a 10-year-old who is the only boy in his ballet, jazz, tap and hip-hop classes and the only boy in his elementary school who would rather dance than play sports, I understand these frustrations.

While some male dancers get past these difficulties, many others decide it's easier to quit. Both male and female dance teachers play a major role in helping young male students deal with the special issues they face. Often, it is the teachers' care and attention that mean the difference between keeping boys' interest alive and letting it fizzle. The following tips can help you keep those dancing boys dancing.

Provide Role Models

Inspire young male dancers by taking them to see shows that feature men dancing, whether local musical productions or performances by touring groups such as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater or Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Kenny Jimenez, founder of Motion Underground in Boulder, Colorado, suggests showing and discussing videos of famous male dancers such as Gene Kelly, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Gregory Hines, Savion Glover and even Michael Jackson.

Male dance teachers provide positive role models for their male students, and can relate to their students' problems and offer advice gleaned from experience. Anthony LoCascio, an eight-year veteran of Tap Dogs who teaches in San Jose, California, and is on the faculty of Professional Dance Teachers of America and Hcctor's Dance Caravan, stresses that boys need male teacher involvement in their dance studies. He talks to his male students about his own positive and negative experiences: "I tell them stories so they won't feel alone, and I tell them that even though I went through all that, I've been on Broadway and I'm still standing here as a dance teacher."

Let Boys Be Boys—Together

Treat boys like boys in class, recommends Jerry Rose, a teacher at Beckley Dance Theatre in Beckley, West Virginia, and the assistant director of Hcctor's Dance Caravan. "Boys, if you've noticed, are always jumping," Rose says, noting that instructors should play on those natural interests and abilities. "Teach them both little and big jumps early in their dance career. [Jumping] is so much fun for them, and is something they can start before their technical ability has been realized both intellectually and physically."

In addition, consider giving boys a class or classes of their own. According to Bethany Hooks, director of the dance program at Center Stage in Brandon, Mississippi, all-male classes can help boys become less self-conscious about their dancing. "As long as it's just the boys in class they even seem pretty comfortable with doing ballet." Jimenez adds, "Boys will find different ways to release [their inhibitions] when they are in that type of environment. Sometimes their

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expression [may be] hampered by the females.” Taking class with other boys also gives male dancers the chance to make friends with similar interests and build camaraderie.

Make sure you offer boys classes in a wide range of genres, not just ballet—for example, tap, jazz and hip hop—and encourage the younger boys to take a combination class, which might be less intimidating than a full hour of ballet.

Deal With Teasing

When young male dancers find themselves the brunt of bad jokes, dance teachers should offer not only an ear to listen and a shoulder to cry on, but strategies for dealing with these situations as well.

Jimenez suggests reminding boys that dancing is every bit as physically challenging as football or soccer. “[Tell] them that dancing is a sport and that it takes a lot of strength and [other] physical attributes that other sports require as well,” he explains. Plus, it enhances their ability in other sports.

Rose tells boys that dancing, even ballet, is not for “sissies” or just for girls. After all, it’s a man’s job to lift and turn the girls. If boys feel self-conscious in tights, Rose suggests pointing out they’re not much different from spandex football pants or wrestling unitards. Increasingly, some high school and college athletes are even taking dance classes to improve their alignment, muscle control and movement coordination. (For more on one teacher’s experience teaching sports teams, read “Out of the Studio, Onto the Field” in DT January 2003.)

Many young male dancers might also be comforted by the fact that, unlike most male athletes, they’ll be surrounded by girls. If the boys are ever asked, “Why would you want to go dance when you could be out on the football field?” Hooks suggests that they answer, “I can play football with the other guys or I can go dance with a bunch of beautiful girls. Whose shoes would you rather be in?” LoCascio tells his male students, “All the guys who play sports will be watching you dance with the girls at the high school dances, because you’ll know how to dance and they won’t.”

Be Prepared to Talk About Tough Subjects

If male dancers come to you upset by being called “gay,” “queer” or “fag,” LoCascio says, “You have to be very honest and treat them maturely. Tell them what those words mean, and don’t beat around the bush.” Explain that dancing does not make anyone gay, but also let them know that there’s nothing wrong with homosexuality. Hooks adds, “Help the boys know who they are. The number-one thing is for them to have confidence in themselves and to be able to stand up to the other guys, to take the hassling and teasing.”

Male dancers also often face a lack of support or even open opposition at home, particularly from their fathers. If you come across fathers who would rather have their sons playing football or baseball, schedule a meeting with them to explain their support will help their sons feel good about themselves and their interests. “The father has such an important role,” Hooks confirms. “I’ve had to sit down with fathers and tell them, ‘Maybe in time your son will want to play football, but for right now this is what he wants to do. You need to encourage him.’”

Allow Boys Their Freedom

If your male students are struggling with peer pressure, feeling uncomfortable in class or finding it difficult to handle the negative issues associated with their dancing, stay positive. Don’t force them to continue. “If they truly like it and they leave, they’ll come back,” reassures LoCascio. “If you try to keep them there, they might end up hating dance.”

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Nina Amir is a freelance writer and book editor based in Los Gatos, CA. Her book *Chicken Soup for the Famous and Not-So-Famous* is scheduled for publication in 2005, and she is working on several others.

<http://www.dance-teacher.com/content/keeping-boys-your-studio>

Washington Post: Helping Boys Make The Leap to Ballet

By Amy C. Hitt

Washington Post Staff Writer

Friday, June 22, 2007

James Brady, 7, plays soccer, goes to Scout meetings and collects Pokemon cards. Then, before soccer practice on Fridays, he does something most boys don't: He takes dance class.

James, of Arlington, became interested in dance after watching his sister, Shannon, 10, in ballet class. He asked his mother to sign him up, but then kept changing his mind. It wasn't until he attended a special event for boys at Arlington Center for Dance that he finally took the leap. Now he is in a boys' class there once a week.

"He loves it," says James's mother, Rachel. "He especially likes the friends he has made and playing with the other boys."

What got James hooked was Boys' Day, an afternoon of dance-related activities at the 25-year-old Arlington studio. The event, which is free, began last summer as a way to build solidarity among the boys already at the studio, says Jan Bull, the school's administrative director. The focus has expanded to become part of an effort to engage boys and widen interest beyond the school. Twenty-seven boys attended the first Boys' Day and 34 the second. The next Boys' Day is June 30.

Local ballet school directors say it is a challenge to recruit and retain boys in such a female-dominated discipline, and they go to lengths to draw them in. Efforts include establishing all-boys classes for the first few years of training and reaching out to the broader community, especially to public schools. After its "Nutcracker" performances, the Maryland Youth Ballet in Silver Spring brings its young dancers back onstage to answer questions from the audience, and the boys talk about their experiences and how their training differs.

Once boys are in the studio, surrounded by a sea of girls, schools say they strive to create a welcoming environment, from putting up posters of male dancers to inviting professional male dancers to guest-teach.

The Conservatory Ballet in Reston encourages early participation for boys, offering a class for 3- to 9-year-olds. "All children love to move; the boys appreciate it just as much as the girls do," says Alexia Redick, the school's marketing director.

One of the boys taking class at the conservatory is Connor Hilleary of Oak Hill. When Connor turned 4 in March, he told his parents that all he wanted for his birthday was dance lessons. Connor's mother, Tanya, says he was inspired by the television show "Dancing With the Stars." He especially liked contestants Emmitt Smith and John Ratzenberger, who was the voice of Mack the truck in Connor's favorite movie, "Cars." When Tanya Hilleary approached the Reston conservatory, the school accepted him right away, even though it was late in the semester.

"The school treats the boys like celebrities," she says. "They need them."

At the Washington School of Ballet in Northwest Washington, a new school director, Kee-Juan Han, is coming onboard in July. He plans to teach all of the boys' classes. Han "wants to invest in and grow our boys' program and provide extra TLC," says Septime Webre, artistic director of the Washington Ballet, which is affiliated with the school and shares its studios.

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This fall the school will expand its partnership with Anacostia's Thearc (Town Hall Education, Arts & Recreation Campus) to provide free ballet classes, transportation and dance uniforms to the first-grade boys at Septima Clark Public Charter School in Southeast Washington, the only all-boys charter school in the city. Webre, who says the program will "set the foundation for a serious boys' program at Thearc," plans to cast the first-graders as bumblebees in the company's spring production of "Cinderella."

The Washington School of Ballet, Webre says, encourages "a strong sense of fraternity" among its young men. "There is a strong male energy in the school, and the boys look up to the men in the company. . . . They enjoy the athleticism, the camaraderie and the performing."

The Arlington studio tries to offer all that, Bull says, with a variety of activities at Boys' Day, including stage combat, hip-hop, jazz, mime, strength work, martial arts and ballet jumps and turns. Instructors include staff from the school as well as such guest teachers as Connor Walsh, a soloist with the Houston Ballet, and Bobby Sidney, who last year taught the boys capoeira, a form of Brazilian martial arts.

"The boys love the stage combat, of course," Bull says, "and parents are pleased to have their younger boys see older boys dancing."

James Brady plans to be back for Boys' Day next week. And come fall, he is looking forward to auditioning for the school's annual production of "The Nutcracker" -- and rooting for his favorite NFL team, the Buffalo Bills.

ARLINGTON CENTER FOR DANCE BOYS' DAY June 30 from 2:30 to 4:30. Ages 5-18. 3808 Wilson Blvd., Arlington. Free. Register in advance by calling 703-522-2414 or e-mailing jan@arldance.org. <http://www.arldance.org>.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/21/AR2007062100703.html>

Blog: My Son Can Dance

“My Son Can Dance” is a blog is written by Nina Amir, the mother of a young male dancer. She talks candidly about the experiences she has mentoring her son, Julian, as he progresses through his studies. There is some wonderful writing and information in this blog. It’s a must-read for all parents of boys dancing. You can visit the site to read her blog or add it to your favorite RSS reader. She’s also available on Facebook.



“I realized what a difficult road it was for young male dancers to hoe early on in Julian’s career. So, now I’m interviewing some of the top male dancers out there and asking them to offer their best advice and their worst experiences and their tips for surviving the tough early years so young boys who want to follow in their footsteps will have the strength, inspiration and tools to do so.”

Nina Amir, from “My Son Can Dance” Blog

<http://mysoncandance.net/>

Forum: Ballet Talk for Dancers

This is one of the best ballet and dance forums out there. There are a wide range of topics covered, from ballet intensives to teacher topics to boys. It is an active forum with lots of great information. And if you need any information or feedback, you can make a post. You can also use their search feature to drill down to the topic and group you're interested in.



<http://dancers.invisionzone.com>