



How to Choose A Ballet School...

One of the hardest choices facing parents today is that of choosing a ballet school for their children. Only a few years ago, it was much easier, but , because of the tremendous growth in the popularity of dance in the United States, there are now a great many schools from which to choose.

That's good, because it means that more children than ever before will be exposed to one of the beautiful art forms in the world. Who can tell how many great dancers will be discovered because of this increase in the number of schools and students?

But it also has made it harder than ever for a parent to know where to send a child to study dance. There is no regulation of dance teachers or studios in the United States. Anyone can open a ballet school and call themselves a ballet teacher!

So how do you choose? What questions should you ask? And when you ask the right questions, what answers should you be looking for?

1. Check the instructor's qualifications.

It's always important to make sure that your child's instructors are qualified, especially where dance training is concerned. Ballet instructors are not licensed in this country - anyone can claim to be able to teach your child to dance!

Ask for information on the instructor's background. Look for someone who danced with a professional ballet company, holds a degree in dance from an accredited college or university, or is certified to teach the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD), Cecchetti, or Vaganova teaching syllabi. Any of these is a good indication that the instructor knows what to teach, when to teach it, and how it should be taught. Accreditation by other dance organizations is of much less value.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, all of our instructors must meet the standards stated above.

2. Ask if a graded syllabus is used.

A syllabus is a study guide that covers what a student should learn and when, as well as the way the step is taught. All good ballet schools use a syllabus as a guideline for teaching. Some use a formal syllabus, such as those of the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD) or the Cecchetti Society. Some teachers create their own based on the particular needs of their studio and pupils.

Ask to see the syllabus that is used at the studio you are considering. If they don't have one, you might want to consider going to another school.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, our syllabus is based on the Vaganova syllabus, with heavy influence from the RAD program and is specifically designed for our students' needs. It is constantly being refined and is updated every year.

3. Ask how old a child must be to begin studying ballet.

Any studio that actually claims to teach ballet to a child under 7 years of age is not one that you should consider using. Children younger than 7 or 8 are not physically or mentally ready for classical ballet.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, children between the age of 3 and 6 go into our Early Childhood program. At age 7, they enter the Grade I-A class, the first level of our classical ballet program.

4. Ask when students go "on pointe."

There are two factors that determine when a young girl can begin studying pointe: how much training she has had, and her age. A child should never be

put on pointe before her feet have the required strength and the bone structure is well developed. While a very few students can start as early as 9 1/2, the average age is 11-12. If the studio you are considering regularly puts children younger than 10 on pointe, you should look elsewhere.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, students must have completed at least three years of ballet training, meet the physical/technical requirements of pointe work, and be at least 11 years old before they can begin pointe.

5. Ask if combination classes are offered.

As a marketing technique, some studios offer classes that combine training in ballet with training in jazz, tap, and/or acrobatics. All in 60 minutes! Think about it. Would you expect your child to learn to play the violin, piano, and clarinet all in the same hour? It's not an effective way to learn. At the Duluth School of Ballet, we teach only one dance form in a class at a time.

6. Ask about the recital?

An end-of-the year performance is important. It gives a young dancer valuable stage experience, as well as the opportunity to use what they've learned during the year. Ballet is, after all, a performing art! But the real question here is how the studio deals with the performance - not whether or not they offer one. Some studios put too much emphasis on the "recital dance," starting soon after classes begin. A child who spends most of his or her time learning a dance doesn't learn much about the art of ballet.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, our year-end performance is designed to compliment your child's classroom training - not replace it.

7. Visit the studio.

In addition to all of the things you would normally look for (clean, well-appointed, good area, etc.), check to make sure the studios have barres and mirrors. And most importantly, look at the floor! Watch out for studios that have concrete or tile flooring, or wood laid directly on concrete. Ballet should not be taught on these surfaces. Jumping on a floor that has no "give" to it can lead to shin splints, knee injuries, and other problems.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, our floors are specially-laid wood floors designed to give the proper amount of "cushion" that dancers need. Most legitimate studios will allow you to visit ahead of time before you make your decision. Some may even let you observe classes. We love to have prospective students and their parents visit us. Just call before you come so we can be sure to meet you!

We hope the information presented here helps you find the right school for your young dancer. - one that provides quality training in a healthy atmosphere. Even though your child may not want to make dance a career, you still want them to gain an understanding and appreciation of the art form.

At the Duluth School of Ballet, we believe every child has the right to learn the art form properly - taught by the best instructors available - and have fun doing it!

If you have more questions, please don't hesitate to call us. We'll be happy to assist you.