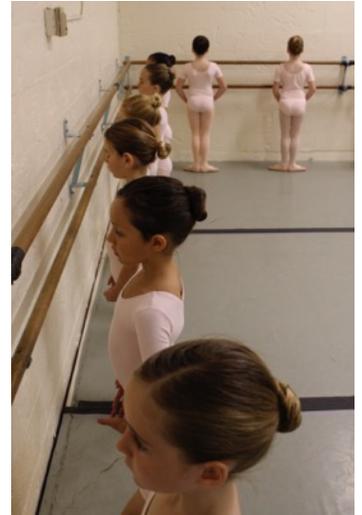


FOR PARENTS: HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR DANCER

If your child is enrolled in our program, they have signed up for something very challenging. Classical Ballet training is one of the most arduous and demanding pursuits any person can undertake. It requires

- mental and physical stamina
- perseverance (there are great amounts of repetition required)
- concentration
- ability to understand abstract concepts
- multitasking
- memorization
- flexibility
- strength
- coordination
- the ability to focus on long-term goals
- the ability to recognize, understand and apply corrections from instructors
- openness and willingness to change
- spatial awareness
- cooperation
- musicality
- attention to detail
- artistry
- respect: for the art form, the instructors, and most of all, for ONESELF



You will agree, that is quite a list. Our training program does develop these qualities, but as you can imagine, this takes time. Your support is necessary for your child to successfully navigate their way through life's challenges. Through your influence and tutelage they grow and learn. Classical ballet training adds a whole other dimension to life's normal trials of growing up. With your help, support and guidance, your child can continue their quest for balletic beauty with confidence and eagerness. It takes a village, or at least a team of qualified instructors and a supportive family. Read on to find out how you can be aware of where you are needed and how you can help your child succeed.

PATIENCE is necessary for both student and parents. Ballet does not happen overnight. Our annual Student Demonstration exhibits beautifully the scope of our program: The very youngest students are starting to practice working together in a group, counting their music, remembering strings of steps and skills, becoming spatially aware, coordinating their arms and legs (which do not often do the same thing), dancing in rhythm, and performing well! All this is nurtured at 4 or 5 years of age. As the dancers mature and develop skills (known in the Ballet World generally as *technique*), you will be able to discern more coordination, strength and musicality. Once the female students start dancing en pointe, further physical skills will stand out: strength, endurance and flexibility are emphasized at this stage.

By the time the students reach the stage where they are beginning to really look like DANCERS, they have endured thousands of hours in class, sweating and working on skills that don't come easily, persevering through difficult plateaus of improvement. Attention to detail and artistry is being cultivated, stage presence begins to shine and only you and your dancer really understand how much work has gone into these results. Ballet is supposed to look easy. But don't let its effortless beauty fool you. It is not easily attained. As a parent of a dancer, your patience and support of the long-term commitment will go a long long way. Your example and encouragement will also help your child to build their own steely patience, which is a valuable virtue.

NUTRITION

Childhood nutrition is important for everybody. As your child develops and grows, nutritional needs must be met to build a strong body and mind. If your child is also participating in a strenuous program such as ours, meeting those needs escalates, both in the body's requirements, and in the importance of eating healthily.

We recommend a **VARIED** and balanced diet. Here in Santa Cruz there are many people who are vegetarian or vegan or have other restrictive diets for one reason or another. Make sure your dancer is eating a well-balanced diet, including carbohydrates, healthy fats and sugars. Do not omit any whole food group unless directed to do so by your doctor!

Avoid processed foods. They don't taste as good as fresh or home-cooked foods anyway! They contain all sorts of additives that usually hinder their nutritional value, as well as usually adding calories. These empty calories should be avoided as much as possible. Pay attention to everything your child puts in his/her mouth. Eating healthy will enhance your own health too.

ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT

Your dancer has to juggle school and ballet training. Depending on what level he/she is in, the training demands can mean hours and hours spent at The Studio and this means finding time to do homework. Many of our students ask for our help in getting alternative Physical Education credits. Others request a study period so they can do homework at school. Still others spend part of their lunch hour studying. Many students bring their homework to The Studio with them and do some when they are between classes. This is a dilemma that is difficult to solve. Schools require more and more homework each year. If you are having difficulty balancing this, consider a school that allows an open period where your dancer can do homework, or consider enrolling in Ocean Grove home school program. These options give more flexibility than many schools in our area. School is indeed very important for our students. Our Directors are happy to write letters confirming the hours spent at the ballet studio for your school to achieve credit (if they offer it). If your dancer is serious about their training, research schools and how flexible they will be before choosing one. This is especially important as the student reaches high school age. There is a huge range of how flexible academic schools are and how many of them put importance on your child's extracurricular training. They may or may not realize that this may be a vocational choice made by your dancer.

Other organizational challenges include getting enough **SLEEP**, family time and household chores. Yes, it is difficult to save time for family, but it can be done if you understand scheduling needs and plan accordingly. The operative word is **PLAN**. Make a family calendar and while

you support your child's commitment to Ballet, also make sure they understand the need to spend time with family when you have scheduled it.

Most serious ballet students do not miss out on time with friends, because their friends eventually become their fellow ballet students. True friends at school will understand that this commitment is important to your dancer.

Sleep is especially important for young students who are demanding so much of their body. Their body is not only dancing for many hours per week, but it is also growing and developing. Sleep is as important as good nutrition at this stage. We used to have a student whose parents drove her from Carmel and back each day for her training, and she would do her homework in the car on the way to The Studio, and eat dinner on the way home so she could go right to bed when she arrived. This is just one example of above-and-beyond parental support that was necessary in her case.



UNDERSTANDING

This goes hand in hand with **PATIENCE**. Your child will surely be frustrated many times after a class. Let him/her vent. This doesn't mean they aren't doing a good job, or that ballet might not be for them. It means they are dealing with emotions that are difficult for everyone. They will learn that ballet skills take a long time. When they begin to understand that this is okay, they will also come to grips of how to deal with their own impatience or frustration. Many of our graduates cite the understanding and acknowledgement that they **WON'T ALWAYS GET WHAT THEY WANT** to be a very valuable thing they learned from their training and will take with them throughout the rest of their life. Children who are raised with the idea that they are entitled to privileges just by existing, will have more difficulty later. Examples include dealing with a job they didn't get or with not being the best at something. If they become dancers, they must learn to accept that there is often more than one person with the skills for a certain role and that it comes down to the choreographer or director's choice; personal preference indeed enters into casting decisions. That's okay — there will be many other opportunities.

Learning how to deal with disappointment is a skill that many young people never learn. But as adults we need it, no matter what we ultimately pursue for ourselves. Classical ballet training, with all of its demands, presents you with the opportunity to help your child through any disappointment or frustration they may come upon. Use the opportunity to your child's advantage. The dancer will learn acceptance, and eventually how to support others around them that may be having the same disappointment or frustration. We adults know that quite often disappointment leads to bigger and better things. Disappointment does not mean failure. Children do not innately know this; we have to teach them.

One of Diane Cypher's favorite examples of young students exhibiting these skills follows. Years ago, a parent was very sad after casting for "The Nutcracker" was posted. Her child wanted to be Clara and was not chosen. She was an adult who was herself having difficulty with the disappointment she knew her child would feel, and she was hoping for some sort of quick atonement for the rejection. This parent was wondering what to do with her emotions and how to bolster her daughter's confidence in the face of denial. She walked through the lobby and found her daughter in the hallway looking at the cast list with her classmates. A couple of the other girls were congratulating the chosen Claras, and one of them was overheard saying, "I was hoping that I might be Clara, but I know there can be only one or two and I'm really happy you are one of them. You are going to be a great Clara!" All of the other students agreed. The mother was flabbergasted. Not only did the girls figure out how to handle the situation on their own, they did so with kindness, diplomacy and grace. If only we could all be so sensitive and generous!

If there is a certain role your dancer covets, there will be specific skills required. All aspects of being a good student come into play: learning the steps in the audition thoroughly and quickly, understanding basic skills (spatial awareness, ability to count the music), understanding and taking corrections, size/height (yes, size often matters, the costumes are designed to fit an array of dancers, but generally they need to fit within a certain size frame for each role), maturity, etcetera. The choreographer or directors are looking for a certain way of acting, a certain charisma, a certain coordination (those Ginger Snaps have to skip with coordination and WITH THE MUSIC), a certain delicacy or strength or flexibility or acting ability. These tasks are all put forth in auditions for good reason. These skills must be seen, and under pressure (as will be on the stage), which is even more daunting for many dancers. Some dancers do well under pressure and others don't. This is a skill that can be improved with experience.

CARE

You care about your child's endeavors and development, and you will make every effort to support them in the ways you are able to. Your support will cultivate their pursuit of this difficult and beautiful and REWARDING art form. They only need help with dealing with difficult emotions because the pursuit of this endeavor is in itself very ambitious. But know that if they persevere, the rewards will outnumber the difficulties. Once they come out of a class in which they have accomplished something new, or a performance where they achieved something they have worked hard for, they will reap the rewards of a long term goal attained. Nothing feels better than that. With your help, support and guidance as their parent, your child will thrive in ballet ... and in life. To quote one of our favorite Santa Cruz dance icons, Sara Wilbourne: *Onward!*



Archival in-Studio photos by James Schwartz.