

# Dance for tots

**F**rom the moment we are conceived our bodies begin working to learn new movements. This is achieved from the brain sending signals to our muscles to execute movements though what is called motor neurons. At birth the motor neuron pathway is very limited and only allows us to perform the basic functions. The completion of a new pathway takes time, as the pathway is perfected the skill moves from being rough and perhaps jerky into a smooth and refined movement, this of course cannot happen without continued practice and effort.

For toddlers who have mastered the art of toddling, they suddenly have a huge amount to explore - and the ability and function of their own bodies is no exception. They suddenly tend to become very active, wanting to move around and explore whenever they get the opportunity. You may have noticed that it doesn't take much to get your toddler dancing, just put on a catchy tune and they will start moving to the rhythm. Toddling around is certainly beneficial, but for a young growing child, it also helps them to learn more about how they can move their bodies and exercise different parts; this is where movement and dance classes come into their own.

There is a widening demand for tots dance classes that offer a selection of genres from ballet, street, tap, zumba and musical theatre. The design and structure of toddler's classes can vary dependent of the dance

school, this is because there is no governing body with a set curriculum.

A tots dance class should be fun, creative and active, with a programme that is age appropriate with logical progression so that the interest and imagination of the toddler is engaged.

The structure and content should include the following elements; variety, imagination, travelling movements, song, fun games, solo, partner and group work with music that complements and enhances the actions. A tots class normally last for thirty to forty-five minutes, the class warm-up should aim to focus the mind and wake up the body, they might dance to well known tunes such as 'If your happy and you know it clap your hands' 'head shoulders knees or toes' or 'Shake my silly's out'

These fun exercises can work on strengthening and loosening the muscles as well as developing the tots musicality and dance technique as they have great fun singing along to the tunes. The second half of the class should work on the basic gross motor skills such as galloping, skipping, spinning, jumping and hopping; these movements can be achieved by dancing a magical adventure or theme, all of which channels the tots imagination through creative play. "We march like a soldier, we tiptoed like a princess, we fly like a butterfly and we jump like a frog" Most importantly the tots should be having so much fun that they are unaware of what they are learning.

Introducing dance to your little one is a great stepping-stone for nursery or school as it enhances their creativity, confidence, fitness, musicality, body awareness, communication and social skills; all of which are useful skills for their physical and mental development.

In a dance class a person is free to move, as they experiment

with their own energy, time and space, whilst discovering the language of movement they begin to speak through their bodies, and without fear can grow into the person they want to become.

Furthermore dance is a fantastic activity in channelling your tot's energy and their need in exploring new ways to move; so why not get your little one started today and they may develop to love dance as a hobby, career or passion.

Most dance schools offer a free trial before committing to the classes. This is a great opportunity to experience what the dance class has to offer and to see if your child is happy in the class.

**"If you can walk you can dance, if you can talk you can sing"**

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