

## **Overcoming Frustration & Anxiety in Dance**

Students often have anxiety about performing, especially if they haven't done anything like it before. Beginner dancers can quickly become discouraged when they get "stuck", like when a movement or series isn't coming to them right away or is difficult to translate onto their body at first. This can lead to students feeling like they are not good enough, which creates attrition for teams and clubs.

We encourage the students in many of our programs to share or perform their work in some way to build those skills. It could be as simple as performing for their peers in smaller groups in a beginner elementary class or as nerve-wracking as performing for their school at a pep assembly, talent show or competition in middle school and high school programs.

However, in readying for any performance, overcoming frustration and mastering a section of choreography through repetition and practice is an important process that all dancers go through. This preparation is a lengthy process, and dance is a practical way to learn that some things take time, persistence and practice. While a performance that may only be 3-4 minutes long, weeks and months of rehearsal may go into committing the choreography to memory, forming muscle memory and building the confidence to perform in front of peers and/or members of the community.

A similar effect takes place when a student is frustrated and feels like they can't "get it". To push past that initial feeling to realize that yes, they in fact can do it, brings a great sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. We have found, through interviewing students after our dance programs, that this translates into other areas of their lives and improves their feelings of resilience, discipline and persistence.

Additionally, we have found that the students who stick with the program and commit to participating in performance are glad that they did. In a post survey that took place after one of our dance programs, all participants said that they now feel less anxiety about performing, and most said that they were "extremely likely" to participate in another dance performance. 80% of them answered that they were also more likely to participate in a different performance-like opportunity like sports activities or the dramatic arts. For some of the students, performing actually becomes their favorite part and they even ask to do more frequent performances in the future. That being said, not all students get to this point as some still decide to opt-out of performances due to anxiety and fear. This may always be the case as students generally process anxiety in different ways, and for some it may be too much to overcome. It is our goal to encourage as many students as we can to perform, so that they too can experience the confidence and resilience-boosting effects of overcoming that fear.

For beginning dancers, even though it may seem scary or unattainable, we encourage them to keep trying when they feel stuck and to take advantage of performance opportunities. The growth of skills seems to suffer greatly for those students who do not take a leap of faith outside of their comfort zone. We try to impress upon students that they may even find out that they really enjoy performing but will never know if they do not at least give it a try. In dance, just like in all things, the most significant growth happens in the uncomfortable and difficult moments.