

Template Email/Letter to Parents

This is offered as one example. Feel free to use or edit all or part of the text – to speak in your own words. The highlighted parts must be checked and/or amended to fit your intention and context.

Subject Line: Maturation & Adolescence for dancers

Dear Parent

This is a long email. However, I hope you will agree with me that this is a complex and important topic that warrants your time.

This email is being sent to all parents of students **in classes at G2 and above**, as your children will be approaching, or are already in the thick of, dealing with the process of puberty. As dance teachers we are very aware of the impact of puberty on our students as dancers during this period. **This email will be sent to pupils as they graduate into the G2 ballet or equivalent class, so everyone is kept informed on an ongoing basis.**

I am writing as your child's dance teacher. I am not a clinician, so please do check up on me with your own additional reading if you wish to. I offer these thoughts as a result of my experience to add to your knowledge of your own child(ren), so you know how we will support your children in this important period of development.

You may or may not be aware of the impact of puberty on a student studying dance. It is my hope to give useful information so that you know your child is being well supported here when they are dancing. We may only see your child for 1 or 2 hours a week, but we have may been working with them for up to 10 years, so we have a 'long view' - and we like and respect them very much.

For each person, their particular experience of puberty is unique, so we have to watch and listen very carefully with no end of patience (!). All adolescents will experience the following at some point and in some way:

- **A changing centre of balance** - either constantly as a child grows slowly and steadily, or in fits and starts as a child has a growth spurt, then nothing for a while, then another spurt etc
- **Inadequate or delayed peripheral sensation/response** - neural pathways are also affected by growth, e.g. the pathway to the ends of a person's toes might rather suddenly be 2cm longer so the message to 'point the toes' might not get there on time for a week or so. The brain catches up, but there are often periods of delayed response.
- **'Blur brain'** - pubertal growth affects the brain too. During this period, the brain is almost completely re-wiring itself. This can make our children seem less responsive and slower in processing information or a bit 'away with the fairies'.
- **Body changes** - new hair in new places, new/different body odour, skin breakouts, changes in perspiration levels, sudden onset of emotions seemingly for no reason, new biological rhythms and cycles.
- **Changes in feelings and struggles with self-expression** - both about oneself as well as others or the world - and these feelings can seem very much more intense, important and urgent than

they have even been before. An increased desire to make their own choices and be different, alongside an inability to articulate/find the words - this is exacerbated by the re-wiring that is happening in their brains. Sometimes they do find words – and at volume!

- **Increased need for fuel** - their bodies and brains are growing and working really, really hard, so they are hungry, ravenous beasts that need regular feeding!

The biological differences even between students of exactly the same age can be enormous. In dance classes at your child's level, they are likely dancing with a broad range of peer age, as they have reached this level through skill and commitment on their own timetable. So whatever your child's own maturity is, they may well be aware (even if they can't articulate it) that some children in their class are starting to deal with some of the things on the list above.

In dance classes, we often hear students at this stage describe themselves as not being as good as they used to be (their words about themselves). They don't feel as polished, or able to demonstrate the refinement or quality of movement they expect of themselves. In addition to that, there are a few practical things that they have to deal with.

Below are two lists of common concerns. The first list comprises things we will and do talk about when we need to. The second list comprises topics we do not raise, as they cover things that are particularly sensitive, which might cause embarrassment, or which are simply inappropriate for us to cover in this setting. If we are approached by an individual student and asked a question or for help, we give it. In both cases our approach is to be straightforward and factual in manner, listening carefully and speaking with kindness, providing aid and discretion as each situation demands.

Conversations we do have in class:

- **Underwear - getting it right!** We think that students should approach wearing a leotard in exactly the same way they would consider wearing swimwear. However, some people prefer to wear underwear whilst dancing for extra support or comfort. That is totally fine and up to individual choice - but it should not be visible. An array of coloured racer-backs and halter necks under leotards is not the aesthetic we're after and boxer shorts under a leotard under dance leggings looks deeply uncomfortable as well as detracting from the dance line.
- **Desire to stand out/not to conform** - Rather than lower standards and see scruffiness creeping in, we have an option for our more senior ballet students (G4 and above) to wear non-uniform dance clothes on Saturdays. During the week we expect uniform to be worn but on Saturdays, bike shorts/cropped leggings instead of tights, over a contrast leotard can be liberating!
- **A drop in energy levels or enthusiasm during or between classes** - this is particularly important for those students attending two classes on one day. Food is the answer and will almost immediately result in renewed energy, enthusiasm and good manners! Please send them with something quick and easy to digest that they can snack on between classes, or immediately before/after class. An ideal food is a banana, but a suitable alternative might be an oatly biscuit, a slice of carrot cake or a cereal bar. We have spare biscuits in the office always and we offer them when we see someone flagging/suffering - but it would be best for students to bring their own supplies.
- **Constant re-correction of 'the basics' or inability to perfect a challenging step** - we advise both as a group and individually to help students find out about their new longer limbs - learning

how to coordinate across the body with confused, new and/or sluggish neural pathways. Reassurance from you at home that they're doing OK will assist.

Conversations we do not initiate:

- **Increased body odour and/or visible sweat marks** - perhaps you could ensure they have a deodorant stick in their dance bag that stays there. Students attending more than once a week will need a second leotard/outfit, as dancewear needs washing each time it is worn (as you would after a sports match). Sweat marks are quite often mentioned openly by students in class, in which case we explain that this is a normal part of dance and is in fact a badge of honour, as it is a visible sign that they are working hard. However, some students are uncomfortable with it, in which case we talk individually to them and in some cases suggest a t-shirt over the top of their leotard.
- **Concern about what to do if my period arrives/is happening right now** - we have spare supplies of tampons and sanitary pads in the office (ask a teacher any time), and girls who are worried may wear dance shorts on those days over their leotards. The great thing about dance is that it's fantastic at helping relieve period-related stomach cramp. It really is possible to dance this out!
- **Newly visible body hair in a sleeveless leotard** when the arms are raised in 2nd or 5th position - this affects the person with the hair, and those working with/looking at that person. This is a matter of personal choice, and so we have no rules. My general guideline is that what works for each individual in a swimming costume in the pool works in a leotard. Body changes can happen quickly, and in winter the only place we're not rugged up is in a swimming pool or a dance studio, so you may wish to raise this with your child when the time is right (in case they're anxious or don't know how to bring it up with you).

I hope very much that you don't mind me writing to you about this. I needed to reach out to all of you and the quickest way to do that is by email. I am completely unembarrassed about any area of this topic, so please feel free to approach me if you would like to chat about your child's experience or to discuss anything in particular with me. If you have particular cultural or religious considerations that are an important part of your child's growth journey, then please do tell us so we can respect and adapt to these with your child as needed.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Best wishes