

The Benefits of Dance For Children With Disabilities

By

Skylar Taavola

Northern Michigan University

English Department

Many parents of a child that has special needs are often hesitant when it comes to placing their child in a dance class. They fear their child may be a distraction or may be too overwhelmed. Many dance classes and dance studios are different in their own ways. It is important to find the studio and the instructor that fits the demands of a child with specific needs. Having a child in a dance class has many benefits; it can improve well being in a physical, psychological, and cognitive way, making it especially beneficial for people with special needs.

1. Physical Fitness

One of the most commonly known benefits of dance, is the improvement of physical fitness. Having the student up on their feet, jumping, spinning, and moving around, burns calories. They increase their muscular strength and endurance when jumping and bending. For people that may have a physical disability, the repetition of moves, different exercises placing stress on different parts of the body, and the shifting of weight, helps them to become more mobile. Having the freedom of movement also helps people with Autism and ADHD. It allows them to exert their energy in a healthy manner. Stretching is an important aspect of dance. Gaining greater flexibility will reduce the risk of injury to muscles, ligaments, and tendons. Stretching is commonly done before and after dance class. Increasing flexibility will reduce the tension and strain there is on that part of the body. Stretching is beneficial for everyone. Many people that have a physical disability like Cerebral Palsy or Muscular Dystrophy often

have tight and tense muscles. Stretching while having fun in a form of dance can be a great advantage for them (Krabill, M).

2. Gross and Fine Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are another aspect of physical fitness that is improved. Strength, coordination, posture and balance are all developed within dance. Fine motor skills are also developed. A fast beating of the leg in ballet, or the brush of a foot on the floor in tap, activates the tiny fast twitching muscles in the body. The improvement of motor skills is greatly beneficial for people with Cerebral Palsy and Muscular Dystrophy that may lack these skills. The use of movement of standing on one foot or the shifting of weight helps immensely with balance and body awareness. Having the ability to move one part of the body while the other muscles relax, promotes body awareness. Gross and fine motor skills, and coordination can help improve everyday events, like bringing a spoon to your mouth or writing your name (Krabill, M).

3. Psychological

Along with many physiological, there are many psychological benefits of DMT of which many people are unaware. With any type of aerobic exercise, endorphins are pumped. Endorphins make you feel happy and relaxed. The moment a song comes on, stress washes away and people don't think about what was worrying them, but about how much fun they are having (Exercise and stress). Being in a safe and helping environment allows patients to feel free from judgement and the ability to be themselves. They build confidence and independence by being able to make their own

choices in a dance class and choose what feels best for them. They build up their self esteem. Many people with a disability may feel judged or lack confidence in themselves. Dancing allows them to express who they are.

4. Communication

They can communicate with their teacher and other students about their feelings without speaking a word. Being able to move their body expresses how they feel in that moment. Non-verbal people can benefit greatly in self-expression through dance. You can tell how they are feeling through their energy levels; sad would be slow, excited or happy would be very energetic. Dance therapy also encourages creativity and imagination. Making up your own dance moves and playing pretend all take a part in dance. Your instructor may tell you to dance as animals one second, then change to a figure skater the next (Krabill, M).

5. Brain Function

Not only are your muscles used for dancing, but your brain also plays a large role in getting your muscles to involuntarily move the way you want them to. A study done by Harvard Neuroscience, discovered that many parts of the brain are used while dancing. Dance increases neural connectivity because it integrates several brain functions at once; rational, musical, kinesthetic, and emotional. The motor cortex, somatosensory cortex, basal ganglia, and cerebellum are all active when dancing. The motor cortex executes the voluntary movement by planning, controlling, and sending out signals to your muscles. The somatosensory cortex is responsible for motor control and eye-hand

coordination. The basal ganglia assists other structures to help coordinate movement, and the cerebellum send out input from the brain and spinal cord to acetate fine and complex motor skills. Repetition of dance moves and routines strengthens not only your muscles, but your brain as well. Repetitive activation of theses parts of the brain are altered creating a stronger neural synopsis (connections), improving coordination, control, and motor skills. For many people with a disability, these neural connections are delayed and disrupted. Dancing improves those connections with which many people (Edwards, S).

6. Memory

Dancing also improves your memory. You need to make split second decisions and think about the order of a combination, to remember what moves come next. Dance is a fast-paced activity that takes a lot brain activity and muscle memory. The more you think about the moves and comprehend each aspect of them with repetition, your muscles begin to recognize the repeated movement to the point where thought is no longer required, because the muscles remember (Beris, R. 5 Things That).

7. Relationship building

Being in a safe environment with other people your age is a great way to build new friendships. Dance class or therapy improves social skills. Doing an activity people enjoy together helps promote communication. Having to work as a team, you build trust and co-operation with your teammates. Many people with a disability, like Autism, may struggle with social cues and social situations. Joining dance will help them practice

those social situations in which they may struggle, like listening to the instructor, creating a conversation, and recognizing emotions (Beris, R. Dance improves both).

8. Listening and Following Instructions

Dance class is similar to a class at school. Dance students learn important skills that will help them in their school class rooms, at home, and jobs in the future. Listening to instructions, taking turns, personal space, respect, being dressed correctly, good posture, and talking when it's appropriate are all skills inherited through dance.

Repetition is important for people with a disability, so being reminded of having good posture always, or when it's an appropriate time to talk can carry out to everyday life (White, B).

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