

STUDENTS - GETTING READY FOR POINTE

1. Everyone's body is different. Everyone's feet are different. Everyone's flexibility and muscle development rate is different. Dancers who go en pointe too soon can injure their feet, knees, joints, back, and bone development. If your teacher says you're not ready for pointe, it's not because they don't like you, your teacher wants the best for you. It's because they don't want you to ruin your feet. This is not an insult to you as a dancer, it only means your body isn't quite ready yet.
2. Don't miss class. One missed class can put you back 3 days physically.
3. Pointe is an absolute joy, but remember it takes hard work and dedication. You must have these skills already or you wouldn't be reading this! It can be uncomfortable at first, it means no more pedicures until you're done dancing (like, forever 😊), and you will be sore for a few weeks until you gain more strength and stretch your tendons out and develop calluses. You will want those and grow to love them!

What does this mean for you as a student?

- No cheating! Do it the way you know you have to, even if it's hard.
- Don't be afraid to ask questions.
- If something hurts, tell your teacher, just in case.
- Listen to your body and learn to recognise the difference between sore muscles and injury.
- It's okay to ice things if they're sore.
- **Be ready to do exercises every day at home.** 100 relevés a day are a must!

I'm not trying to scare you out of pointe work... but remember pointe is a serious commitment, and it takes as much mental strength and maturity as it does physically. Work with your teachers, listen to your body, and remember your dance journey is just that - personal to YOU! Good luck, we are here to help and we are so proud that you are embarking on this amazing creative journey!

PARENTS WITH DANCERS - GETTING READY FOR POINTE

Preparing for pointe is a long process (typically a min. of 2 years in our pre-pointe program). Young girls usually start dancing en pointe between the age of 10 and 16. Before this, their bones have not ossified sufficiently; serious foot deformities can result from starting pointe too early. Girls must not go up en pointe until the bones of their feet are fully developed and the muscles in the arches, ankles, legs, pelvic area and abdominals are strong enough. We want to do everything we can to avoid injuries that can occur because of weak, untrained muscles. All of this requires careful evaluation on the part of the teacher. Dancing en pointe requires one to use the entire body for support, including the legs and abdominal muscles.

Once a dancer is ready, preparation for pointe work is a slow and gradual process. At first, it is just strengthening exercises at the barre - for example, simply going up en pointe and coming back down. The dancer must have sufficient "roll-through" in the feet and shoe: the rolling action of the foot from flat to half-pointe to pointe and down again. Then variations in speed and position may be introduced-- for perhaps no more than five or ten minutes. It is often only after six months to a year of this that one can start dancing en pointe in the center. The entire process takes time and close supervision by the teacher. **The pointe work of beginning students should never be done unsupervised. Dancers should NOT wear their pointe shoes and dance at home, unless the teacher has given them specific exercises to complete.** Pointe is a delicate way of dance. Pointe shoes are not like regular soft ballet shoes. Pointe shoes consist of satin, with a shank--or sole--comprised of stiffened leather, canvas, and burlap sealed with glue. The box, or reinforced toe area of the shoe is made of stiffened and reinforced canvas and/or burlap. Elastic and ribbon are used to secure pointe shoes onto the dancers' feet, although the latter adds an element of decoration as well.

Common injuries

Dancing en pointe can place stress on the dancer's feet, common injuries related to dancing en pointe are:

blisters - caused by repeated rubbing of skin against the rough hardened inside of the shoe's box. Blisters can be prevented or lessened by carefully wrapping the dancer's toes with ballet tape, or using some type of thin padding.

bunions - a bone deformity usually in the dancer's big toe, caused by cramping of the toes within the shoe's box. Dancers can prevent bunions by putting a spacer between the big toe and the next toe and wearing properly fitted shoes.

bruised toenails - caused by heavy pressure on the front of the nail. This can be very painful.

corns - Corns are similar to calluses, but smaller. They have a hard center surrounded by inflamed skin. Corns usually develop on parts of your feet that don't bear weight, such as the tops and sides of your toes. With dancers they usually develop in between the toes. Corns can be painful when pushed or may cause a dull ache.

Cuts can also occur between toes, as a result of the pressure of a dancer's toenails digging into the toes next to them; however, with proper trimming and filing of rough corners or use of a protective barrier, this rarely happens.

Injury prevention

Dancers find methods to prevent chafing and blisters. Beginning students often use lamb's wool or "toepads" made out of soft material or gel. Wads of lamb's wool may also be used just in certain areas where a dancer feels the most pain. Many dancers also use sports tape to tape around their toes in order to further prevent blisters and bruised toenails. These precautions will help

*** All of these injuries are considered normal wear and tear on a dancer's feet.** As always, a student should let her teacher know if she is experiencing any type of pointe related injury so that we can suggest a proper care plan. *Please do not assume that your dancer is going to incur any or all of these injuries due to pointe work, we simply want all of our dancers and parents to be fully informed regarding this important step in your dancer's dance education and training.*

SUGGESTED GUIDELINES CRITERIA FOR POINTE WORK

(whilst remembering that every dancer is different).

The student must be 10 years or older.

The student must have at least 2 years of training.

The student must be taking a minimum of 2 Ballet classes a week consistently, more is better.

The student must have sufficient strength to do the following:

- Be able to hold their turnout while dancing.

The most basic concept of ballet is turnout. It makes it possible to do certain steps that could not otherwise be done. Holding turnout while dancing is a good sign of strength. If the student does not have the strength to maintain their turnout, they are not strong enough for pointe, since it is much more difficult to hold turnout en pointe.

- Have a strong, straight back while dancing, especially the lower back.

Pointe work requires that the student use the muscles in her legs and feet to stand en pointe and not use the pointe shoes as a crutch. A weak back will throw the student off balance while en pointe and will make it difficult to do ballet steps. A straight back is also essential for pirouettes.

- Keep the heels forward toward the big toe (no sickling).

The most stable position for pointe work is to have the weight slightly forward over the big toe. If the weight is over the little toe, it is more difficult to stay up en pointe, and will increase the chances of strain and injury.

- Use plié while dancing.

Students must use their pliés while dancing because this is how they get up en pointe. If they don't use their pliés, they will have to bend their leg incorrectly in order to get en pointe. Pliés should be done with the knees pointing straight over their toes and with the heels down. This includes while jumping from two feet as well as one foot.

- Point their feet while dancing.

Students must point their feet while dancing in order to strengthen the muscles that pointe-work requires. These muscles need to be strong enough to support their body weight on the ends of their toes. If the student is not in the habit of using these foot muscles then they will not be able to support themselves en pointe and will probably knuckle over on their toes, thereby increasing their chances for injury.

- Pique passé with straight leg.

Student should have enough strength to push themselves onto three quarter-pointe. This step (pique passé) is harder to do en pointe and a bent leg is usually a sign of weakness or improper step preparation.

- Be able to do Multiple relevés in the center without stopping.

Strength for pointe work is achieved by repeating exercises. Relevés are excellent for building up calf muscle strength, which is vital for pointe work. This exercise is more difficult to do en pointe because of the extra height, so strong relevés on three quarter-pointe is a good sign of strength. The student must also go up as high on three quarter-pointe as she can, since pointe work demands this ability. A student who keeps her heels very low to the ground is not preparing her calf muscles adequately, and will not have the strength for pointe work.

- Be able to hold a passé balance on three quarter-pointe.

The student should be well-placed (hips square, back straight, legs turned-out), and have the strength to balance on three quarter-pointe. This pose is more difficult to correct en pointe, as the surface area for balancing is smaller and the strength requirements are greater.

Please be advised that the staff here at BAPA WILL NOT put any student on pointe before she is ready. Your dancer's health and safety are our main concern. Your child's dance journey is individual to her. We do not take into account her age, or friendship groups when ultimately deciding her readiness for pre-pointe or pointe shoes.

It is never in our interest to hold a student back. We want all our dancers to be incredibly successful and continue to thrive and love ballet as much as we do!

Each dancer is a beautiful individual and we will treat them as such.