

“Things to Consider When Considering Touch”

Dancers are complex sovereign individuals. For dancers to be prepared for the realities of the professional world, we believe they should be encouraged to exercise agency over their bodies and choices as early as possible. Dancers require as much respect as anyone else in the room. How you teach is just as important as what you teach.

Recognize + Acknowledge

1. You are in a position of authority, you hold power and students/dancers have certain dependencies on you.
2. Dance often relies on unrealistic attitudes towards perfection and strict obedience from a young age. You have a responsibility in shaping a healthy, independently thinking and moving dancer.
3. You have a responsibility to create a safe, equitable, and creatively productive environment among the group of dancers you are working with. Be self-aware of any tendencies you might have towards favoritism and/or neglect aimed at any given dancer.

What are Boundaries?

Boundaries refer to self-determined limits the dancer defines for their own body and self. These limits can refer to how and where they want to be touched, or they can refer to physical limitations determined by a dancer's technical mobility. Do not force anyone into positions that are unsafe. Although it's good for a dancer's progress to help them push their limits, be aware of when and how to best do so.

What is Consent?

Consent is a type of knowing and voluntary permission regarding both physical and non-physical interactions. In the studio, consent is needed for physical corrections and adjustments.

Develop a safe, minimally interruptive way to ask for consent.

For example, before you begin a class, you can ask the dancers to close their eyes and have those that are not up for touch today to raise their hands. This limits embarrassment among peers and allows you to take note without interrupting the flow of the exercises.

Another suggestion could be to ask each time you approach a dancer.

Or

Make it known that any dancer can approach you prior to the start of class and privately acknowledge any issues they may have.

Be creative. New solutions will likely arise through trial and error.

NOTE: Consent levels change so it's good to **check in daily** or more frequently with your students.

Consent relies on communication and creates spaces of trust, how do you communicate and create trust with your students?

Touch

Sometimes there is no better way than through touch to demonstrate proper form.

Sometimes a person might just be having a day where they don't benefit from being touched.

There's **always** merit in asking for consent.

Never touch a student/dancer when you are feeling upset (e.g. overtired, unhappy, frustrated, etc.)

Never force a dancer's body into unsafe positions! *These may vary from dancer to dancer.*

When approaching a dancer to give a correction, ask yourself...

1. How am I feeling emotionally at this moment?
2. What is my goal with this correction or adjustment?
3. Does this correction, comment, or adjustment maintain respect to the dancer's personal physical boundaries and self-determined level of consent at this time?
4. Does this correction, comment, or adjustment, align with the dancer's personal goals?
5. How can I make this comment in a respectful way that offers clear and specific information?

Take a moment to reflect on your own thoughts and emotions before considering touch. It can be very easy to inadvertently project personal negative thoughts or feelings onto a dancer.

Allow space for a dancer to question or say no to a correction or physical adjustment, either verbally or nonverbally - train yourself to look for non-verbal cues indicating a dancer has stopped giving consent. This may look and sound different from person to person. **Silence alone is not consent.**

NOTE: Be sure the dancer has all the proper information about how to safely execute a step or string of choreography, especially if it's new or dangerous.

Discrimination

Implicit bias leads to unconscious behaviors. Your students and you have been raised in a sexist, racist society and these elements influence the way we perceive and treat others.

Be aware of how a dancer's willingness to be touched affects how you think about or treat them differently. Regardless of a dancer's consent level, these are not grounds on which to judge a dancer personally or cast a dance.

NOTE: Having a choice can be incredibly empowering for a learning dancer. Artists must be empowered to perform their best.

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