

UNDERSTANDING AGE COMPRESSION IN DANCE

In the early 2000s, a new trend called age compression took off in marketing. Brands began targeting their products—toys, clothing, makeup—to younger and younger consumers, working off children’s natural developmental urge to grow up quickly and do adult things. This “kids getting older younger” idea oozed into the dance industry. You may have seen age compression applauded and rewarded at some dance industry events.

Age compression creates risks for young students both physically (training in movement that may be harmful to still-developing bodies) and emotionally (being rewarded for addressing mature themes, dressing “older,” or performing in a sexualized manner). The pressure to perform at an advanced level, as well as the internalized desire to be “the best,” can cause children to experience extreme anxiety or burnout at younger ages.

It is YPAD™’s stance that this upward trend can be reversed by the collective efforts of studio owners, teachers, choreographers, event directors, and parents who will say “no more.” Dance educators can counter age compression by being clear about age-appropriate movement, costuming, music, and content within their classrooms and in their performance offerings.

Healthy children hit expected milestones developmental milestones naturally and are not forced to “age-up” by external pressures or circumstances. Follow these steps to allow your students to grow as people and as young artists at their own pace.

- 1 Create and/or follow an educational curricula of proven technical building blocks.
- 2 Design lesson plans so that natural talents or quick studies can still dance with their appropriate peer groups rather than much older students.
- 3 Temper parents’ expectations for rapid advancement of their child into higher levels or advanced classes (such as pointe) by explaining that your placement policies are designed with each student’s physical and emotional growth in mind.
- 4 Studio owners, set proactive guidelines and expectations for teachers’ choreography and check in often to make sure they are being met.

These dance students will only be little once. Protect them, empower them, and let them enjoy the journey to achievement!

Source:
[YPAD™ Education](#)