

HELPING STUDENTS BUILD MENTAL STRENGTH

In teaching a positive coaching framework to industry professionals, mental performance consultant Dr. Chelsea Pierotti believes that all dance educators have the power to enhance their students' personal and artistic experiences.

At the core of this framework is understanding the difference between mental health and mental strength. With those definitions in mind, educators can better understand their role to influence impactful mental skills in their dancers, such as building a growth mindset, developing resilience, and staying motivated.

"Mental health refers to the presence or absence of a mental health issue," Dr. Pierotti says. "It is a clinical term, and so a dance educator's role in that is minimal, outside of noticing potential signs of mental illness and knowing about local laws and resources. Mental strength is about recognizing and understanding emotions, and learning how to manage them."

Promoting a growth mindset is one way educators can help students gain skills in mental strength. Here are examples of what you can say to promote this area of development:

Preschool dancers

- "You are working so hard. Thank you!"
- "Let's try it together. Now you can try it by yourself!"
- "Wow! I can tell you've been practicing."

Elementary dancers

- "I can see your progress from last month to this month. How does it feel?"
- "You kept calm and kept trying even when you got frustrated. I'm proud of you! Let's take a brain break and then try again."
- "I'm going to challenge you with a new step today, but I think you can do it. Let's push a little harder and try it out."

Tween and teen dancers

- "What was hard about this combination? What can you try differently next time?"
- "I've noticed your pirouettes are stronger now than they were last month. How do you think you made those improvements?"
- "Your hard work with these skills really shows. Try adding this new layer of challenge to take it up another notch."

Remember that the sincerity and authenticity of what you say and how you say it matters, says Dr. Pierotti. "Don't be afraid to push your students, but stand beside them as you do it." Be there for them from the beginning, through the challenges, and all the way to the achievement.

Sources:

Dr. Chelsea Pierotti, [mental performance consultant and founder of the Passion for Dance podcast](#)
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