

## HOW TO CREATE A BODY-POSITIVE ENVIRONMENT

Body image is the attitude a person has about their physical body, and it is formed by one's beliefs and inner thoughts.

While many children—particularly girls—struggle with low self-esteem related to negative thoughts about body image, dancers can experience additional stressors associated with classes and performances. It is important for students to understand that bodies come in all shapes and sizes, and physical appearance does not predict ability. Dance educators can help students embrace this mindset.

You can create a dance atmosphere that is accepting of all students and recognizes achievement over appearance. Your words, actions, and intent will show students that you value them for so much more than their appearance.

- Eschew stereotypical references to body size or shape (“She’s so thin and beautiful!”).
- Choose language carefully (“Let’s get you a costume that fits better” rather than “Let’s get you a larger size”).
- Choose costumes for dancers with every body type and skin tone can be comfortable and confident onstage.
- Cast for ability rather than whether a student “looks the part.”
- Correct form and technique, not appearance.
- Praise professional dancers or other artists for their technical abilities rather than for their looks.
- Hang up or paint body-positive statements (“EveryBODY is beautiful!”) throughout the studio.
- Explain that the mirror, if used properly, is a helpful tool for alignment, technical adjustments, formations, and spacing.
- Have conversations about the benefits of positive self-talk and self-care.

Work to dispel your students' negative thoughts through positive reinforcement of what a healthy body is and what it can do. With your help, your students will come to love what they see in the mirror!

Source:  
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