

Dance/USA

Task Force on Dancer Health

TRANSITIONS IN A DANCER'S LIFE

TRANSITIONS: WHAT ARE THEY AND HOW DO THEY AFFECT DANCERS?

A transition is the process of changing from one situation to another. It means letting go of one phase to invest energy into the next. Dancers undergo many transitions in their careers from pre-professional through the various stages of early, mid, and end. Typically a successful dancer is equipped for challenges by having developed a great work ethic, an ability to tolerate change, and acceptance of delayed gratification. They are resilient, sensitive and adaptable to sudden change. Success is associated with self-care.

Transitions demand many decisions. Change is inevitable with shifting roles, schedules, contracts and seasons. After studio or conservatory training a dancer may have to decide whether to continue training at an academic program or to audition for a professional position. They may have to decide which style is best for them, or simple things such as changing the type of shoes they wear. Whether voluntary or involuntary, a sudden unexpected shift can be upsetting. With gentle acknowledgement and mindful acceptance, dancers can adjust. Stress happens with both positive or negative situations. By developing healthy coping strategies such as journaling, meditating, taking nature walks, and developing reliable friendships, the anticipated stress can be reduced.

MANAGING STAGES IN A DANCER'S CAREER

Early-Career Hurdles

- Relocation away from family and friends to a new school, town or neighborhood.
- Learning from new teachers, directors, and choreographers.
- Fatigue and stress from previous audition season and current training adjustments.
- Navigating academic studies while dancing.
- Peer socializing and dating.
- Independent self-care, including forming networks of stability and learning living skills such as food preparation, sleep management, laundry, travel safety, and acceptable living conditions.
- Independent business skills including finance management, scheduling, and dance network management.

Early-Career Resources and Coping Strategies

Check out local dance resource transition centers. On-line access to more distant resources and auditions are available in magazines such as *Dance Magazine*, *Pointe Magazine*, and *Dance Current* (some have audition editions). There are related opportunities through international arts organizations such as [Culture360](#). The [Canadian Alliance of Dance Arts](#) offers suggestions for contracts.

Ask lots of questions; not only to peers but to trusted adults and teachers about how to audition both locally and on-line. Dancers tend to be respectfully silent. When you get a job ask more questions about the facilities and social rules. Such conventions as bathroom breaks or nutrition breaks when the facilities are available for personal practice.

Identify safe individuals and mentors. Learn and practice personal safety skills.

Seek out conditioning groups associated with rehab programs such as Pilates, Gyrotonic/Gyrokinesis®, and yoga studios. Performing faculty as well as students could share valuable insider information. Check out what health resources will be available to you and how you will afford them.

Be sure to develop essential living skills before you leave home such as cooking, laundry and group living etiquette. These simple skills carry many performers into successful full professional lives.

Make sure you take care of your inner self. Develop outside interests to keep life balanced during intense periods of training and performing, layoffs, and furlough.

Learn and practice, persistence, power, boundary and consent safety rules and other personal safety skills using resources from support network (consent and safety resources below).

Mid-Career Obstacles

- Dancers often change companies and geographical locations, this may require adaptation to different procedures, circumstances.
- Dancers may have to adapt to altered relationships with fellow dancers due to advancement such as an upward promotion or a special role.
- Biological clocks and family planning may be complicating factors in career goals. The intense focus needed on moving up in a career can strain a partnership or marital relationship.
- When couple relationships in the group change this can cause the stress of an uncomfortable work environment.
- Behaviors in a closed group such as a dance company may range from expressive to assertive to aggressive words and actions, indicating the need for intervention and change.

Mid-Career To-do List

Get prepared. Changing companies is best done on a positive note. Write notes of thanks and give little inexpensive remembrances. Dance is a small world. Keep in contact with your friends.

Plan ahead for change. As with the first transition, ask numerous questions.

Step outside of yourself to see a different perspective if self or group dissatisfaction arises. Avoid using email or social media when angry. Sharing with a really trusted friend prevents regret.

Expand your social network. Fresh viewpoints and ideas spur creativity and prevent burnout. Something as simple as joining an outside group or class keeps spirits alive. Consider continuing education on-line.

Check if your contract or agreement covers mental health. Ask your human resources or union representative for in-house or local resources.

Check if your company has a dancer representative or anonymous suggestion box relaying dancer needs. All organizations need suggestions.

When moving on, look for agencies that support housing while transitioning. The Actor's Fund is known for helping with living until a dancer can re-settle. (see resources below)

Check if your company covers the costs of conditioning and nutritional programs. Sometimes local gyms sponsor dancers.

Check if your company offers work life balance resources or programs to ensure both professional and personal goals are recognized and achieved.

Recognize that dance is a profession. You are in business. Learn about financial management and planning. [Investment planning](#) can start with little money.

Read the fine print before you sign on the dotted line. A dancer under contract may be subject to penalties just like any national sports figure. Search for legal aid societies if you need help understanding the legal terms of contracts.

Educate yourself about harassment and bullying. On-line education and resources are found from Dance USA, Dance NYC, and International Federation of Actors (see resources below).

Late-Career Obstacles

- Major injury or multiple minor injuries due to increased rehearsal hours and performance seasons.
- End of career coming too soon, with some dancers making no plans until they are forced.
- Abrupt changes in work status from artistic director changes or company closures from company financial constraints.
- Depression, boredom, repetition, and burnout creeping up as a result of long hours and fatigue.
- Excitement from learning new skills and opportunities, spurring desire for change.

Late-Career Solutions

Most people will experience a career change. Most dancers will have a second career. The sooner one begins to train for the next career, the easier the transition and the more realistic your expectations will be. Be ready for unexpected opportunities. Try out new activities and explore hidden desires for business ventures.

Dancers in late career stages experience loss in one way or another. Illness, injury, pregnancy and burnout may blindsides a dancer. Recognize this event. Envision a pivot. Start with a daydream. A pivot is not necessarily all or none.

Increase your self-care regimen around recovery. Balance your work and outside life to prevent burnout. This can be as simple as upping your scheduling, naps, reworking your sleep routine, and taking up a new hobby.

Maintain your interest by researching the style, background, or music of the present repertory.

An exit plan can prepare a dancer for their next career opportunity. If possible, they should continue to take class, support their dance friends and never forget that once a dancer, always a dancer.

Look both inside and outside the field for transition ideas. Dance transition resource centers may provide funding plus counseling. Many dancers choose to go into directing, teaching, choreographing, starting schools or taking over established ones.

Dance-Related Career Transition Ideas and Resources

[8 Dance Related Careers To Pursue After Dance Life](#)

[15 Great Dance-Related Jobs for Dancers](#)

[Liberal Education for Arts Professionals \(LEAP\) Program](#)

[Dancer Transition Resource Centre](#) (Canada, Switzerland, Australia)

[Career Transition for Dancers](#)

[Designated Sharing Time for performers](#) (Canada)

Consent and Safety Resources

Informational Papers by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health:

[Big Little Secrets: Traumatic Experience in the Dance World](#)

[Concerned about Abuse and Harassment on Tour?](#)

Suggested References

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Disclaimer: The information on transitions contained in this paper is intended to help guide and inform the dancer. It is not meant to take the place of the advice of a medical professional. This information is provided by Dance/USA Task Force on Dancer Health.

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