

Dance/USA

Task Force on Dancer Health

HOW TO TALK ABOUT A DANCE INJURY

Dancers are athletes as well as artists and have a good understanding of the importance of caring for the body through proper nutrition, technique and alignment. In spite of this, research shows that 80% of dancers will experience a significant injury during their career. It is beneficial to have a framework for talking about injuries with your teachers, directors, fellow dancers and family.

Unfortunately, it is common for dancers to hide their injuries for fear of seeming weak, being overlooked for a prime role, or not appearing to be a hard worker. It can be daunting to admit that you have an injury or that something in your body doesn't feel quite right; especially when dancers are competing for parts. But more often than not your teacher or director really wants to know the truthful status of your injury.

Performers may be non-communicative with directors and supervisors about an injury. This can lead to a situation at performance time, where the performer is unable to participate in the show and consequently multiple performers have to be shifted to make up for the loss of one person. It's much safer for the group and health of the company to be honest early on by respecting your body's current status. It is important to know when and how to communicate when you have an injury that could impact the group as a whole.

Learning how to communicate about an injury to your director, choreographer, family, teachers, and fellow dancers can be an invaluable tool for ensuring a safe environment and timely return to dance after injury. Additionally, being able to support and advocate for yourself in this way is an important life skill.

Here are some tips to help you on your way:

1. Make a meeting outside of class or rehearsal time

Class or rehearsal time can be too hectic to discuss an injury and develop an action plan. Make an appointment with your teacher or director to be able to have the time to fully explain your game plan for return to class or performance.

2. Be specific about your injury

If you don't fully understand your diagnosis it's likely your director will not either. Work with your physical therapist or other healthcare provider to fully understand the bones, joints, and muscles involved in your particular injury so you can give a good description on your own. Being able to describe your injury allows you to take more ownership of the injury and potentially heal faster due to increased understanding.

3. Emphasize that your healthcare provider is asking you to take the time off or modify

This can be a sticky situation. Many dancers feel obligated to continue dancing when they are not well enough to do so. Dancing with an injury can ultimately cause more harm in the long term. Your healthcare provider may ask you to limit dancing for a few days/weeks or limit particular parts of class/rehearsal. By explaining that this is what the healthcare provider has asked you to do, you can hopefully avoid feeling pushed to do something you are not ready for. The idea of relative rest may also be a good option. This means avoiding certain activities that aggravate the injury. Your healthcare provider is happy to write up a set of activity restriction guidelines to share with your teacher or director.

4. Present an action plan of what you will do to recover

Most teachers will appreciate a time frame for returning to dance. Sometimes this is really difficult to offer as all injuries heal differently. But do your best to describe what you will be doing to work towards your return (examples: PT/trainer appointments, specific exercises, cardiovascular training, barre first before returning to center, etc).

5. Follow up

Follow up with any new information when you can to keep the lines of communication open. It is always best to keep your director/teacher in the loop so they know what to expect when they see you in class.

6. Stay true to yourself

Always listen to your intuition when it comes to your body. After all, you may be studying with a particular teacher or dancing with a certain company for only a few years. But you are in your body for the rest of your life!

Be sure to include some mindful movement, outdoor time, or journaling to help you register how you feel and to cultivate trust in your body.

7. Change your habits

Your physical therapist or trainer may give you suggestions about proper alignment and technique as you return to dance class and rehearsals. It's a great idea to share these ideas with your dance teacher/director so they can assist you in the overall process of enhancing your dance health. Your healthcare provider may also recommend a specific short term modification (i.e., less turn out or lower gesture leg) while returning to dance. Discussing this with your teacher/director ahead of time will enhance their understanding of your path to return fully to dance.

8. Family/friend support

Family and friends are important and often comprise your biggest fans. Expressing joy and gratitude for their support can help you feel even more supported through your healing process.

Ultimately, being up front about an injury will help you dance longer and stronger. It is better for you, your career, for a director's planning of a production, and for your performance ensemble as a whole.

These tips have been excerpted and modified from healthydancercanada.org

Disclaimer: The information on how to talk about a dance injury 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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