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Why Healthy, Age-Appropriate Dance Matters for Children

REDLANDS, Calif. — As children are exposed to increasingly adult content across media and culture, concerns are growing about how those influences are showing up in spaces once considered safe, including children’s dance education. From music and costuming to choreography and performance expectations, many young dancers are being introduced to themes and movements that are not developmentally appropriate.

DA:NCE Awareness (Dance Awareness: No Child Exploited) is a national nonprofit working to educate parents, educators, and communities about the impact of hypersexualization in children’s dance and to promote healthy, age-appropriate alternatives that support children’s physical, emotional, and social development.

“Most parents trust that dance studios are a safe environment for their children,” said Mary Bawden, Founder of DA:NCE Awareness. “What many don’t realize is how normalized adult themes and sexualized movement have become for kids — often without malicious intent, but with real consequences.”

A growing body of research has linked early sexualization to negative outcomes for children, including body image concerns, anxiety, decreased self-esteem, and distorted views of identity and worth. Studies cited by organizations such as the American Psychological Association and the National Dance Education Organization have raised concerns about age-inappropriate movement and performance expectations for pre-pubescent children.

DA:NCE Awareness approaches the issue through education, advocacy, and collaboration rather than blame. The organization provides free resources, engages in national conversations, and works alongside dance professionals, parents, and youth advocates to encourage thoughtful, child-centered dance practices.

“We believe dance can and should be a powerful force for good in a child’s life,” Bawden said. “This is about protecting childhood, supporting educators, and ensuring dance remains a place where kids can grow, create, and thrive while never feel pressured to move or act like an adult.”

Current DA:NCE initiatives include the Healthy DA:NCE Directory, which helps families identify studios committed to age-appropriate instruction; the DA:NCE Coalition, a volunteer network of advocates working to create cultural change; and the Trailblazer Award, which recognizes leaders advancing healthy dance education.

About DA:NCE: In children’s dance classes around the nation, young children are learning to dance with choreography that hypersexualizes them and their bodies. DA:NCE is committed to raising awareness around this issue while providing free resources for dance teachers, parents, and concerned adults who want to take a stand against the sexualization of children in dance.

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