



NHB Helpful Hints



When can I go on pointe?

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The bones of a child's feet start to become harder at ages 9 - 11 years. This is why it is commonly thought that dancers should not go on pointe until this time. Actually, it is during this time that the cartilage growth plates are becoming harder. However, the cartilage and growth areas do not form into bone until about ages 18 - 20.

Going up on pointe should really be made on an individual basis for each dancer at about 9 - 11. The surrounding musculature should be strong enough to stabilize and reduce stresses and strains to the joints and immature bones. The dance teacher is the one who should and can best assess several of the following prerequisite guidelines in determining the student's readiness to begin pointe work.

Prerequisite guidelines

1. A pre-requisite for pointe work is approximately 3 years of formal ballet training. This should develop adequate strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Barre and floor work should be performed easily.
2. The dancer must be able to go onto the center floor and be able to releve and hold passe position. This means that the dancer must be able to stand balanced up on the ball of one foot with minimal shaking for a period of 15 - 30 seconds. She should also be able to walk in the releve position without problems. If this is not possible, then the muscles are probably not strong enough to support the body's weight. This may also mean that there is an inherent structural problem present, such as a flat foot deformity in which the joints of the feet are not locking properly and becoming rigid enough to support the upper body.
3. There should be good body alignment while in the releve position. In fact, if a line with a weight on the bottom was hung from the center of the kneecap, it should fall centered over that foot. Likewise, the hip rotation should match that position of the knee and foot. For instance, when the hip is turned out, the feet should be equally turned out. There should not be excessive collapsing of the arch or the opposite foot position termed sickling.
4. When the child is in the barefoot releve position, proper technique must be evaluated. Placement of the toes on the ground is evaluated. The fat pad on the bottom of the toes should be in contact with the ground. The toes should not be curled downward or knuckled. The weight should be centered on the ball of the foot as well as to the bottom of the toes. The same should hold true in ballet slippers or pointe shoes.
5. Flexibility of the ankle for adequate pointe must be assessed. The dancer should be sitting on the floor with the legs extended straight in front. The feet are extended into the pointe position so that if a yardstick was placed on each knee and extended toward the feet, the stick would rest on the toes, or below the level of the knee. Without adequate pointe of the feet, the child risks straining muscles and causing abnormal stress to joints of the ankle, knee and back.