



BENEFITS OF DANCE FOR KIDS

by Chris Lechner

Whether it's ballroom, ballet, hip-hop or freestyle, dance is a form of expression for all ages. It has been proven that dancing provides many benefits for adults, but what about our younger counterparts?

The youth of today have a more sedentary lifestyle than those of us who were born prior to the '80s. With the advent of gaming consoles, internet, social media and TV on demand, there are more things to keep their attention indoors instead of going to the park or the community pool to play with friends. Children today also have more stress. They have more pressure to excel in school, peer pressure from their friends and, with 24/7 news piling on, the woes of the world.



Dancing is a physical activity. With childhood obesity on the rise, regular dance sessions may help in improving a child's overall physical health. Regular dance classes can help with poor posture, flexibility, increase muscle tone, stamina, coordination and balance. Dance is also an aerobic exercise, which is beneficial to cardiovascular health and brain health from the increased blood flow. Dancing utilizes almost every muscle in the body—an excellent way for a child to burn up some of their excess energy and help them get a good night's sleep.

In addition to being a physical activity, dance is a social activity. The National Dance Education Organization claims that "dance has many benefits for kids by helping foster teamwork, cooperation and trust while creating new friendships among their peers." Dancing can help if a child is shy by reducing anxiety or being fearful of performing in front of a large group by helping them feel connected to others. Dance can help in teaching understanding and respect, as they are taught in a safe, controlled environment. Dance does not discriminate, and children are introduced to others from all walks of life.

To become a skilled dancer, a person requires practice, discipline and focus. *FamilyTalk Magazine* says that "students who have dance in their background tend to have higher test scores and perform better in math and science." Dance may enhance their awareness, cognition, memory and learning. As a child practices what they learn during their lesson, it encourages them to do better by increasing their focus. By taking regular dance lessons, a child can learn to adapt to changing conditions on the dance floor which can be useful in other areas of their life.

Dance is a great outlet that children can use to pour their feelings into. It can help in regulating behavior, stress and frustration; boost self-esteem and self-confidence; and not to mention, dance is fun. Children can learn to communicate through body language and other non-verbal methods. It is a way to create new friendships with fellow dancers and build their own social network. Like adults, children have stress too, and dancing is the perfect release to forget about our worries for a little while.



Chris Lechner works at Music In Motion Dance Studio, in Tucson, which offers affordable youth classes in ballet, ballroom, lyrical and hip-hop. Fall semester begins the week of August 12 and is 18 weeks long, with a dance showcase (recital) on December 14. They offer multi-class and multi-child discounts. Connect at 520-447-7841 or MMDanceAZ.com. See ad, page 12.