



## **A children's dance class routine by Anne-Marie Martin of diddi dance**

diddi dance are funky pre-school dance classes for girls and boys. Classes help with co-ordination, rhythm and gross motor skills whilst also boosting children's confidence.

Using various dancing games and exercises, bells, hoops and dance ribbons to diddi dance's own funky pop songs, little ones not only improve their rhythm and co-ordination but also social and gross motor skills.

The diddi dance classes were devised and created by Anne-Marie Martin, a professional dancer with over 20 years teaching experience. After running for over 10 years in London there are now diddi dance classes all over the UK.

Below Anne-Marie offers some excellent guidance and advice about children's dance, dance classes and activities that can be done at home.

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## **Get your kids active through dance**

With obesity rates in children at an all-time high it's so important to find them an activity they can enjoy and have fun in. Not only do energetic activities have obvious health benefits but they also help with a number of other development areas for children of all ages.

### **Getting children active can help them develop:**

1. Confidence
2. Expression
3. Creativity
4. Communication
5. Social skills.

## **Find an activity that inspires your children**

The activity should inspire and engage your child. With the winter months looming, finding an activity that can be done indoors, too, is perfect.

## **Dance has a natural appeal to children**

A prime example of an engaging activity is dancing; with so many styles to choose from there's one to suit most children whether its street dance and hip hop or ballroom and salsa.

Research has shown that even from babies; humans have a natural love of moving to music, you may have noticed when an up tempo song comes on your child may naturally bounce, wave their arms, tap their feet or wiggle to it. It's this natural love that makes a dance class so appealing, as long as it's fun and engaging then most children will enjoy it.

## **Encourage dance from a young age**

It's never too young to start! We've had children in our diddi dance classes as young as 16 months! We find they can follow a few basic instructions and are confident on their feet. It's amazing at this early age what they can remember week after week through fun repetition and structure.



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## **The benefits of dance for your children**

Dancing is creative and a great form of expression. Children get to express their feelings through movement, being spontaneous and uninhibited. At an early age they move with freedom and as they get older they can explore choreography and how to put moves together to create routines or pieces that can be expressive, narrative, emotional or purely physical.

### **Dance is an activity that keeps children fit and healthy.**

Dance is high energy and raises the heart rate to improve fitness and stamina. In an age of computer games and the internet it's important to get children active. Not all children will enjoy more competitive or single sports, they may be more sensitive or of a creative nature where dance can really help. Dance also helps with muscle tone and flexibility when more technical styles are studied at an older age.

### **Dance is great fun and helps children gain confidence.**

With the repetition of routines, warm ups and exercises children start to know what comes next, they learn the moves and feel confident with their achievements. As long as the sessions are all engaging at an early age and ability selected at an older age children feel confident within class and are allowed to flourish and shine.

### **Dancing helps with co-ordination and gross motor skills.**

Learning how to move arms and legs at the same time but doing different things is a great co-ordination skill to achieve.

### **8 key motor skills that your children will learn by dancing**

1. Rolling
2. Jumping
3. Bouncing
4. Flicking
5. Twisting
6. Turning
7. Balancing
8. Kicking

And there are many more actions learnt in a dance class. Exploring how the body can move in so many different ways and do so many different things they wouldn't normally do enhances both co-ordination and motor skills. More intricate moves can help with fine motor skills as well, especially in a style such as Bollywood with such intricate hand movements and gestures. The techniques offered help children understand how the body works and develops. They learn and feel muscles moving and how the body can create shapes and lines.

### **Dance is becoming more popular than ever**

Dance has never been so popular, there are so many TV shows focused on dancing its extremely popular and sociable. So many people want to dance now, especially boys which is fantastic. Whether its ballroom like on the TV programme 'Strictly Come Dancing' or hip hop like the dance group 'Diversity' lots of children are



discovering dance classes. Children from lots of local schools may attend one class so as expanding a child's network of friends and enhancing their social skills. In our diddi dance toddler classes we gently encourage partner work between the children so to build their confidence and independence. Seeing their favourite popstar on TV performing dance routines inspires children to move as well.

### **Dance breeds a healthy attitude to competition**

Not just with others but within one-self, to achieve more, be better and work harder. Dance takes a lot of practice and movement memory. Through the repetition, moves get easier to remember so the focus can then become on perfecting those moves.

## **How dance classes can help your child's confidence**

Dancing is a sociable, group activity where children are encouraged to lose their inhibitions. Routines are often repeated week after week encouraging every child of all standards to achieve the steps and formations so once they get it right their confidence booms. Classes should be inspiring and motivating so every child feels involved and encouraged.

### **Performing helps confidence**

The performance aspect, whether it is on stage or just showing the parents in a class really helps with confidence too. Whilst initially for the first time it can be a little daunting, the buzz performing creates is incomparable and children love that feeling of achievement. Seeing and hearing the applause and praise during performing is a huge boost to any child.

### **Learning repetition helps build confidence**

At diddi dance classes, for toddlers, we keep the lesson plan the same every week except for a few elements that change with every new dance style. This gives them confidence as they start to remember what comes next and with gentle questioning they are encouraged to say what's next or join in on the counting song or circle dance. We clap and give praise in every element of the session encouraging the diddi dancers to feel positive and commended.

### **Give your children time to feel confident**

I've taught children before who have taken weeks to finally pluck up the courage to join in, preferring to watch whilst building up their confidence and then suddenly joining in and knowing the whole lesson! Each child takes their own time to grow in confidence, some come in booming with self-assurance and others take a good while to let go of their parent's hand. Both are completely normal characteristics, some children need to feel able to perform elements correctly first before putting themselves "out there" whereas some naturally feel comfortable in groups. In both situations week after week their confidence will grow subconsciously through having fun.

## **How dance can help your child's creativity**



Dancing is a fantastic form of expression. Most classes involve some sort of freestyle dance where children can do their own moves, whether it's in the warm up exercises and games or during a routine. This is a great chance for them to let go, lose their worries and express their feelings or emotions through the freedom of movement. They're exploring how their body can move, what it can do and how it can express emotions.

### **Dance has emotional benefits for children**

Through self-expression, dance has emotional benefits. Dance is commonly used as a form of therapy known as dance movement therapy. Where children may not feel comfortable talking about something, they can express this through movement. Dance is one of the arts and all creative arts can enhance expression. Children can get lost in the music and freedom of space to move within.

Dance is also fantastic for children with additional needs. They may not be able to communicate that well but can express things through dance, opening doors within them.

### **Get your children dancing at home**

The great thing about dancing is that you can do it anywhere. You don't need any equipment and you can even create your own rhythm and beat with a clap or stamp of your feet. So there's no excuse for your children not to be dancing at home.

### **You don't need to be a dance professional!**

If you're not much of a dancer yourself, you may feel a little funny at first, but that's the main thing about it – have some fun and let yourself go – you're safe with your kids! Put on some of your favourite music and let your child have a groove and you'll start to notice which songs and types of music your children start to enjoy. It can also be a great way for your little ones to start building their character as they display preference and interpret their feelings for music into dance. Allowing them to move in freedom and go with the flow is the best way to start – you don't need to know any dance steps.

### **Dance with a toy instrument or a streamer**

Give your child something to dance with – a toy guitar, a streamer, hula hoops or instruments all enhance movement and can be a great way to encourage movement to start.

Dance with them! Some children might feel unsure about moving at first so get involved, show them how much fun it is and encourage them to laugh and smile. Children learn from what they see, hear and experience, so the more they see you being comfortable with yourself dancing, the more likely they'll be comfortable and confident with themselves.

### **Keep dancing simple to start with**

Try some basic moves and steps with them, simple marching and clapping or stamping whilst waving, these all build up co-ordination making moving easier to explore

Watch dance. Many children's TV channels have at least one dance program on. They will love copying the moves of bubbly expressive presenters. Just like in our classes the toddlers love following their favourite teacher and I'm often told how they mimic them at home with their toys or even their parents and siblings teaching them how to "diddi dance".



## **Help your children's rhythm with dance**

At a young age, children move to music naturally and may or may not have rhythm. In many cases children will copy what they've seen on TV or what they watched their friends or parents do. To help your kids develop their rhythm and encourage natural movement in time with music there are some really simple steps you can do together.

### **5 simple dance moves to help your children's rhythm**

1. Marching – it's a move that can make a lot of noise and therefore keep in time to the music
2. Use instruments to shake, tap or bang along to a beat
3. Isolate body parts, just move the shoulders up and down or wiggle your hips to the beat
4. Clap while you move to keep the beat, this also helps with co-ordination too doing 2 things at once
5. Bounce smaller children gently on your lap to the beat of a song to help the rhythm get into their bodies

The main part of dancing is to keep in time with the music! Help your children listen to the beat and practise moves will enhance any natural rhythm within. We use instruments in diddi dance to help with their rhythm skills, shaking, waving or tapping to the music – these are all easy ways to develop rhythm.

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## **5 things you'll see your toddler enjoy in a dance class**

1. Exploring moving to music
2. Learning their body parts
3. Being sociable in a group
4. Moving with bright props
5. Dancing with their parents or carers.

Every child responds to dance styles differently though it's good to remember, so where as one child may enjoy a more disciplined style another may enjoy more of a creative movement class. One may enjoy getting funky in a street dance session another a soft lyrical class.

FUN is the main word at this age as they're just being introduced to a class structure and up to the age of 5 how a child perceives being active is instilled. They should always think being active is enjoyable so as to encourage them to continue into adulthood.

**Hope you enjoyed your diddi dance session and hopefully you'll take away from this class plenty ideas to try at home.**