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# 6 Important Conversations for a Better Dance Community

MARCH 15, 2021 · DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY, CHANGEMAKERS, MENTAL HEALTH, CAREER

Last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed our way of life, the idea of a post-pandemic world was abstract and unclear, especially for the dance industry. Would people ever sit elbow-to-elbow in theaters again to watch dancers perform? How will dance classes resume in-person? A year later, despite having a better picture of what it'll take to maintain a safe and fulfilling post-pandemic lifestyle, the question that remains is, *How different will our world feel after the pandemic?*

The answer to this is up to us.

The pandemic raised a lot of alarms about the dysfunction of our society, and in many ways, we've worked together to examine and reframe this ill-balanced structure so that our post-pandemic world can be a healthier, kinder, safer place to live. As dancers and dance teachers, we encourage you to use this pause as an opportunity for re-evaluation and to start having conversations that are long overdue in the dance community.

To help start the conversations, we've listed six topics you can - and should - discuss with your dance students and colleagues today.

# 1. Body Image & Acceptance

In a recent New York Times article, "[What is a Ballet Body?](#)" Gia Kourlas reflected on how the pandemic gave her and other dancers free time to reflect on what a "ballet body" means in contrast to health and happiness. In the article, ballerina Laura Lauvette posed the question, "How can body image, a fraught topic for any female dancer, no matter her size, be a source of strength rather than agony? Could this pause in live performance be an opening for the aesthetic requirements of ballet — especially extreme thinness — to change?" It's time to have a conversation with your dancers and fellow colleagues about how to address body image issues, with a focus on health and strength instead of weight and body shape.

## Navigating the Conversation

- **Health**

Educate and encourage your students to consume a proper diet. Explain the importance of maintaining a healthy body mass index, and how to stay hydrated.

- **Exercise**

Explain which muscles are used to achieve certain postures and share exercise techniques based on that, instead of exercising strictly for weight loss.

- **Rest**

Resting is just as important as working, and should not be seen as a sign of weakness or failure. Ask your dancers what they do to relax and recover.

- **Bullying**

Create a safe space for dancers to report bullying incidents privately and without retaliation. Train your instructors to be mindful of their words when offering coaching to dancers. Ask your dancers if they've ever felt bullied in the studio; having this conversation privately is usually best.

**Related:** [\*Pointe Black: A Conversation with Marie Astrid Mence on Racism and Bullying in the Dance Community\*](#)

## 2. Diversity & Inclusion

Create and hold space for dancers of different backgrounds by making them feel welcomed and comfortable in it. When people feel comfortable and free to be their true selves without criticism or judgment, they can show up as their best selves. In the dance world, inclusive space can be the difference between a good dancer and a legendary dancer. Your dancers and instructors should understand that when they enter the studio space, there is a common and shared respect for differing beliefs and backgrounds.

### **Navigating the Conversation**

- **Racial Discrimination**

Share techniques for having healthy conversations surrounding race. Acknowledge holidays and traditions observed by other cultures. Create procedures for reporting and responding to racial misconduct.

- **Gender Inclusivity**

Discuss different gender identities and how to respect them, including proper pronoun usage and avoiding using terms that are offensive or triggering.

- **Body & Image Inclusivity**

Work with your colleagues to research, support, and promote dancewear brands that carry a wide range of sizes, fabrics, and shades. Allow dancers to wear leotards that are flattering and comfortable on their bodies. Understand that hair textures in dancers will vary, and strive to be more flexible about required hairstyles.

**Related:** [\*Harnessing the Power of Privilege with Board Chair Amber Cabral\*](#)

## 3. Equal Opportunities

Eliminating disparities in the dance community means creating and sharing opportunities that are accessible to everyone. Brainstorm ways your studio can discover or create opportunities for dancers to take advantage of.

### **Navigating the Conversation**

- **Awareness**

Encourage dancers to research and share opportunities that may be beneficial to their fellow dancers. Whether it be [scholarships](#), volunteer opportunities, or specialized classes being offered elsewhere, raising awareness of the opportunities available to dancers is half the battle.

- **Affordability**

Work with your studio's board to find ways to offset expenses for dancers. Think of ways to fundraise for your studio. Consider different pricing systems and payment plans for dancers enrolled in your studio. Research [grants](#) that could benefit your dancers in some way.

- **Creating Opportunities**

If your dance studio has plenty of financial resources, how can you share the wealth? Can your studio afford to offer a dance course for free? Think of opportunities you can

create for your dancers, or dancers from other studios who are less endowed.

## 4. Career Development

The transition from college to the professional dance industry can be overwhelming. How can you help dancers feel more confident and prepared for this? Do they know what's important for successful career growth? Have conversations that give dancers more preparation for what's to come after graduation.

### Navigating the Conversation

- **Professionalism**

Speak with your dancers about the changes they can make now to show professional companies they are serious about their careers. These conversations could cover [social media etiquette](#), standing out in auditions, and more.

- **Preparation**

Help your dancers get prepared to enter the professional dance world. Explain what's important to include on a [dance résumé](#), how to network, how to create a [dance website](#), and understanding what will be expected of them when they become a professional dancer.

- **Taking Care of Business**

Many dancers become freelance dancers before, or instead of, signing to a company. For those who choose to follow that route, helping them to understand the business aspect of it all will start them off on a great foot. Consider sharing insight on how to open a business bank account, filing taxes as a freelancer, etc.

**Related:** [Brown Ballerina Advice: Briana Stuart on Living Abroad, Entrepreneurship, and Sharing Black Culture through Stepping](#)

## 5. Sexual Harassment

In many athletic industries, there is often a high risk of sexual harassment incidents. This could be due to the hands-on nature of the sport as well as the focus on physical appearance and performance. Helping your dancers understand how and when to speak up about sexual harassment is essential to their well-being as well as your studio's reputation.

### Navigating the Conversation

- **Identifying Harassment**

Have informational sessions explaining what's appropriate and what's inappropriate in the dance industry. Your students and staff should be well educated on this topic. Open the floor and allow dancers to express what they are and aren't comfortable with.

- **Consequences**

Make sure your dancers know when to speak up, who to speak to, and what happens when they do. Create strict guidelines and consequences for students and staff who do not abide by anti-harassment guidelines.

## 6. Mental Health

Dancers need to know that they are human, and that's okay. They can embrace their emotions and thoughts without fearing criticism or judgment. Prioritizing mental health in your studio can save a life, or two.

### Navigating the Conversation

- **Rejection**

Do your dancers know how to accept rejection and bounce back from it? Inform them about healthy coping mechanisms and exercises for encouragement, such as reciting [affirmations](#), when they need to empower themselves and others.

- **Self-Care**

Talk to your dancers about setting healthy boundaries, speaking up for themselves, and understanding their worth. Share ideas for self-care that they can apply to their everyday lives.

- **Support Systems**

In your studio, create a healthy support system for your dancers. Create opportunities for mentorships and bonding exercises that help them feel connected and supported by their dance community.

**Related:** [Brown Ballerina Advice: Erica Lall on Being Expressive On Stage, Performance Prep, and Keeping a Positive Mindset](#)

Studio owners and teachers, what are some conversations you're having with your dancers? Dancers, what topics do you wish would be discussed? Let's start the conversation in the comments below.

Always remember that one conversation could save a life, change a life, or change a perspective.



COMMENTS (0)

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