A-Class Parents’ Guide to Dance Competitions

At A-Class Dance, we offer a variety of competitions as an optional opportunity to develop your child’s dancing skills. Entering competitions is a great way to improve technique, build teamwork, confidence and resilience. Competitions range from local team events to the most prestigious national championships and our aim is to support and prepare each student to fulfil their potential at their choice of competitions.

**SupaDance Competitions**

At SupaDance, there is an opportunity for your child to dance with a partner of their own age for one of the A-Class teams as well as entering separate Ballroom and Latin competitions as a couple. This means that no matter what level you are dancing at, from complete beginner to experienced junior, you can earn points for your team while also seeing how far your partnership can progress against others. This is competition that is designed to be as encouraging and inclusive as possible: there is an A and a B competition to ensure that the less experienced dancers can still progress through some rounds and all dancers get to compete in a full team match. The more experienced dancers in each age category will often (but not always) be the most successful, but there is a real sense of team spirit and fun no matter what level you are at. Younger dancers can learn a great deal from competing with those who are a year or two ahead of them and will eventually start progressing to later rounds as they grow in experience and maturity.

The SupaDance season starts in the New Year (usually in late February/ early March) and culminates in a national final (usually in Blackpool) in December. Your child needs to make a commitment to their partner, their team and the School for the whole season, as dropping out before the end of the year is unfair on your child’s partner and the team.

**IDTA Medallist of the Year**

In this competition your child will dance with an older partner allocated to them by the School and there are no team events. All our partners are experienced, talented dancers who have been successful in IDTA and similar competitions themselves and they will work hard to help your child prepare for the competition and dance to their full potential on the day. Our partners are volunteers who undertake the role to support younger dancers in the school and they follow the School’s code of conduct to ensure successful partnerships in which your child will thrive as they prepare for the competition.

In order to be eligible to dance, your child will need to have taken an IDTA medal test that year: these are dance examinations organised at the School, where each of our dancers will dance one or two dances with one of their teachers in front of an IDTA examiner. These are intended to be positive, confidence-building occasions with examiners looking to positively reward children of all abilities.

With a medal test completed, your child can enter the regional qualifier, which takes place in November and may progress to the national final which takes place in April in Blackpool. In order to qualify for the Blackpool event, dancers will need to reach a certain round in the regional qualifier. The standards can be high in this competition, and each round is a challenge; qualification is by no means automatic. However, those that do qualify have the opportunity to dance in the legendary Empress Ballroom in the Winter Gardens and to compete with dancers who have qualified from other regions across the country.

The IDTA also run occasional one-off events which can be good experience for dancers prior to the main regional / national event.

**Other competitions**

Some dancers in the school compete in ProAm and Open Competitions. The standard at this level is very high and considerable commitment (and financial support) is required from dancers and their parents. Please talk to the Principals if you are interested in finding out more about your child progressing to this level.

**FAQs**

**What can I do to help my child prepare for competition?**

Be guided by your child – are you and they sure this is something they want to try? Do they understand that there are likely to be some disappointments along the way as well as excitement and success? If the answer is yes, ensure your child attends at least one weekly private lesson and practices as advised by their dance teacher. Encourage them to do their best, enjoy taking part and not worry too much about the results, especially to start with.

**How much will it cost?**

The overall cost will depend on how many lessons your child has in preparation. You should also factor in outfits, shoes, entry fees, tickets for participating children and spectating parents, team jacket, travel and (for finals in Blackpool) hotel costs.

**What will they need to wear?**

Your child will need appropriate dance wear. For SupaDance, this will need to be agreed with their partner, as they will need to match, whereas for IDTA, they can wear their own individual choice of outfit. These can be bought new or second hand, and as such, costs can vary (anything from £50 to £300+ for under 12s), but your teacher will be able to give you an idea of where to obtain an outfit and how much to spend. They will also need the right style of dance shoes for their age group.

**Do dancers need to wear make-up and fake tan?**

Yes – but the levels of tan and make-up depend on their age, with younger competitors only needing touches of colour and older competitors requiring more. Your teacher will advise further.

**What about hair?**

This is definitely a skill to learn over time, although styles do not need to be complicated when you start out. Long hair will need to be slicked back in a bun; short hair will need to be styled with product to hold it in place. There are regulations around hair accessories for girls, which should be a simple flower or bow in the same colour as their dress. Jewels can be added when your child is 12 years old or above. Your dance teacher will advise further. Where possible, the School will make arrangements for a stylist to offer hair appointments for our dancers so that they can look extra special for big competitions. These appointments can be arranged the day before the competition to avoid time pressures on the day of the competition itself. The hair is styled so that it stays in place overnight as well as on the dance floor the next day.

**Can I choose my child’s partner or make particular requests around partnerships?**

All partnership decisions are made by the School and our decision is final. There are many variables around partnership decisions, and we have the necessary overview of the many different factors that will ensure the arrangements work for the best development of individual dancers and the school overall. It is not possible to accommodate individual requests as this would not be fair to all dancers.

**What happens if my child falls out with their partner?**

When two young dancers are competing together there can occasionally be a few bumps in the road. This is a normal part of learning to work with others and we encourage our dancers and parents to be patient and positive with each other; forgiving of occasional mistakes (we all make them!) and supportive of progress made. We would always recommend talking to your child’s teacher if you feel your child’s partnership needs some additional support. Please note that we are not able to change partnership arrangements midway through the season unless there are exceptional and unavoidable circumstances.

**My child has attended all their lessons and practices and worked really hard – does that guarantee success in the competition?**

No, it guarantees improvement. With continued effort and attendance, your child will gradually develop technique, confidence and performance. However, there are many factors which affect success in a competition: age, experience, the luck of the draw, where the judges stand on the floor, performance on the day and so on. Ultimately dance competitions come down to the subjective opinions of a panel of judges – success can never be guaranteed!

**How will competing affect my child’s confidence and development?**

This is another question where there are a number of variables.

We will always give our pupils the opportunity to compete in competitions if they are keen to do so. Whether they dance just one round or make it all the way to the final, every competition provides an opportunity to learn and develop as a dancer. For the reasons given above, it is impossible to predict how successful a dancer will be on any occasion, but as their experience increases, so will their confidence and resilience.

There will be competitions where your child does not progress as far as they would like, and it’s normal for them to feel disappointed on these occasions. Each round, the numbers of successful competitors are called and these children continue to the next round. If your child’s number is called, they have made it through to the next round; if your child’s number is not called, they are out of the competition. It is a moment that takes some getting used to, but it’s all part of learning to be a competitive dancer. Your child’s teachers and partners will help to reassure them that they tried their best and encourage them to keep working hard and come back stronger next time – and we hope parents will do the same. Dance competitions teach children to win and lose with good grace, developing resilience and character for life. As well as learning to manage their own nerves, performance and outcomes, children also learn to be team players, learning from, celebrating and supporting other dancers in the school.

**My child is getting upset about others progressing further than they are**

This is a fact of life for dancers (and everybody else!) – there will always be people who are further along in a particular journey than you. The trick is to learn from others, be inspired by them, set yourself achievable targets and make progress on your own terms, not anyone else’s. In one sense, the only dancer you are competing against in any given moment is yourself – if you have performed to your full potential in that round, you are winning! And if you haven’t – you have something to work on for next time.

Some disappointment (and occasionally tears) in the moment is very natural – especially when your child is really passionate about dancing - but if you feel your child is routinely finding competing upsetting rather than inspiring, talk to one of the Principals. It might be a good idea to leave it for a while and come back to it when they are a bit older.

**Are nerves normal?**

Absolutely – although all children react differently, with some getting extremely nervous, and others seeming to be have no nerves at all! One of the reasons why dancing is such a great discipline is that it helps children develop their ability to manage their emotions, including nerves, at big occasions where they are very invested in the outcome. Over time, you and your child will work out some strategies to help such as ‘zoning out’ with headphones, sharing nerves with friends, physical activity such as stretching – everyone is different.

If you feel your child will not thrive in this environment it is perfectly possible for them to continue to enjoy dancing without entering competitions: they can attend group and individual classes and prepare for examinations. Please do feel free to discuss the best approach for your child with their teacher.

**How is a typical competition day organised?**

Competitions usually start around 9am. As seating is not normally reserved, competitors and spectators will often start queuing for up to an hour or so before doors open in order to secure seats where they want them within the School’s designated seating area. Sometimes a programme will be published in advance, but schedules always vary depending on the numbers of dancers in each competition, so once the competition has started, you need to listen carefully to announcements about which rounds are coming up. If your child needs to leave the competition area for any reason, you should check carefully that they have time to do so (and if in doubt, assume they don’t). During the early stages, there may be lengthy waits between rounds, but you need to stay alert because you never know quite when the next round will be called. End times are not usually known in advance as it depends on how many dancers turn up on the day. In some competitions there is a round called ‘repechage’. This is a ‘second chance’ round – an opportunity for judges to see dancers they may have missed in the first round. If your child is not called for repechage, it means they have gone through to the second round. It’s the only time in dancing when it’s fine not to hear your number called!

All dance competitions are structured slightly differently and it can be a bit confusing at first. If in doubt, ask any of the teachers, older pupils or more experienced A-Class dance parents. We are a friendly, supportive school and we all aim to help each other and ensure the best possible day for everyone in the A-Class team.

**What do I need to bring with me on the day?**

Parents should pack (and encourage their children to get used to helping!):

* Food and drink for the day – there are usually cafes at the venues, but it’s better to eat little and often throughout the day in the venue itself, so you don’t miss a round. Always pack more water than you think you will need as dancers will need to keep hydrated
* Your child’s outfit in a garment bag
* Socks (and spares) and shoes
* Makeup to touch up with
* Sewing kit
* Hair repair – grips, spray, combs
* Plasters, wipes, tissues, calpol / paracetamol
* Safety pins for your child’s number and a pen for entries
* Shoe brush (not essential but most dancers have one in the bag)
* Something to wear over their outfit in between rounds such as a dressing gown (this helps ensure the outfits stay clean when eating)
* Your A Class jacket (essential for Supadance competitions)
* Something to do between rounds – books, phone, games etc, otherwise it can be a long day for little ones
* Your tickets for the event

**Safeguarding and Supervision**

Parents are required to be responsible for their children at all times during competitions and supervise them as you would in any other public space. Parents should also help to ensure that children are ready for their rounds and behaving appropriately during breaks. Our dancers are ambassadors for the School and we expect all dancers to represent the School positively at all times and respect the rules of the competitions and venues we attend. If you have any safeguarding concerns at competitions, please speak to one of the principals.

**And finally**

If you have any questions at all about any aspect of dance competitions, please don’t hesitate to ask. Whether your child chooses to compete or not, we look forward to supporting them on their dancing journey!