

DANCE *for* PD[®]

Training Module #3 (beta) Safety

This module will help guide you to:

- ✓ Understand how you build a class that provides a safety net without drawing attention to it
- ✓ Utilize teamwork to provide a safe environment
- ✓ Exercise effective class management and communication to prevent problems before they happen
- ✓ Build relationships, not protocols
- ✓ Think before you react
- ✓ Practice handling chair assists and falls

Overview

Avoiding a bad fall is the primary safety concern in a Dance for PD class. People with PD commonly fall, often due to poor control of balance, misjudgement of surrounding space, slowed reaction response to being put off balance, and occasional dizziness. Commonly persons with PD who freeze and cannot move at all for some time are more at risk for falling than those who do not. Some persons walk much too fast with small steps (festination) which leads to a fall. In five years of weekly classes in Brooklyn some five people have fallen, resulting in one bruise and one cut. Someone in your class may fall but there are ways to ensure a safe environment so that injury is avoided or minimal.

Falls are more likely to occur during class transitions—moving from sitting to standing, or moving from the barre to center work. And it can happen when people get carried away in the movement and misjudge their balance or strength. Keep in mind that most people with Parkinson's fall from time to time and have probably fallen before. Also keep in mind that in our experience, being conscious, musical and directed in a dance studio—a wide open space without obstacles—seems to reduce both the chance of falling and the potential dangers of falling (hitting an object or twisting an ankle on an uneven floor). Since Dance for PD classes can be aerobically demanding, and the PD population can be older, it may also a good idea for someone in the class to have basic CPR training.

Key questions

What safety concerns should I be aware of when I'm teaching a Dance for PD class? What can I do to maintain safety while keeping the class moving and the tone fun? How do I deal with various situations as they occur?

Class structure builds a safety net

The Dance for PD approach builds seamless safety awareness into the progressive structure of the class. Following the model of a standard dance class allows for safe exploration and preparation. Here are five class elements that help build that safety net:

1. Starting and working in chairs stabilizes and reassures. Students progress through a seated warm up to stretch, coordinate and prepare the body for standing. The back is engaged and prepared to support the spine; the proprioceptors on the feet and ankles are warmed up.

2. Behind the chair and barre work act as a transitional phase before unsupported standing.

Tips: Use barre time to evaluate students' placement and remind persons about how to achieve good posture, especially if people are falling backwards. Use chairs that are the proper height, and sturdy and make sure participants can see you demonstrating at the barre (don't face toward the wall).

3. Circle dances build a wall of support on either side.

Tips: Place people with balance issues between two stronger partners, or between teachers. Some people with bad tremors have expressed the desire to standing just outside or inside of the circle without holding hands—or just holding hands on one side—if they are uncomfortable. They are included in the circle, but may not make contact on both sides.

4. Across the floor phrases emphasize smooth shifting of weight from one leg to the other, or steps that keep weight on both feet throughout the duration of the phrase (grapevine, Broadway strut, speed skating watch heel touch, etc.)

Want to learn more?

Please join us at a training workshop!