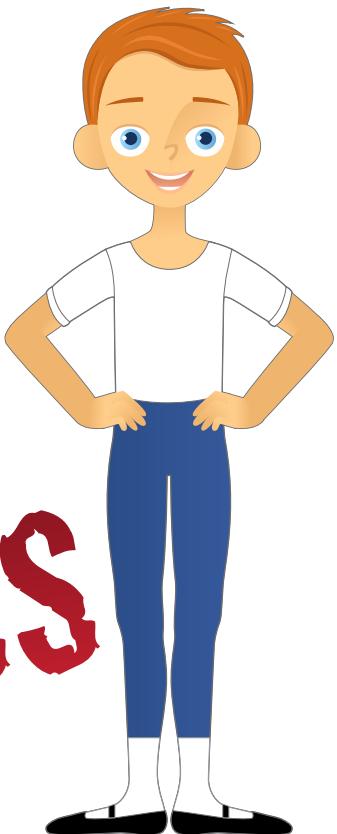


NEWCASTLE
DANCE
ACADEMY

presents

SECRET BOYS BUSINESS



A guide for young male dancers,
presenting questions you may have about
certain less well covered subjects, and are
not sure where to go for answers.

Dancing, whether it is hip-hop, jazz or ballet is a tough discipline, and for boys is especially athletic. Dance is not just about expressing yourself physically, it is about making shapes and drawing lines with your body. It is something you can do for yourself by yourself, but it is also about showing yourself and your abilities to an audience. One of the reasons why dance costumes are designed the way they are is to help the audience see your body in all its athletic, artistic and dynamic forms. This guide should help to raise the curtain on questions sometimes raised about dance gear for boys, along with some other issues rarely talked about.

SHOES



Ballet shoes are the essential piece of equipment for all dancers. They are light, close fitting shoes which allow full movement of the foot and ankle, show off the shape of the foot and permit just the right amount of stick and slide for dancing ballet steps. The most important piece of advice about ballet shoes is this: always have your ballet shoes professionally fitted. This means going to a dancewear shop, trying on the shoes and having an expert tell you which size is best.

Question: Why is this?

Answer: Well, first, if you are new to dancing you may be surprised how snugly ballet shoes are meant to fit. Ballet shoes fit much more snugly than normal shoes (although not tightly) and should not be bought with room to grow. They need to fit like a glove to ensure the shape of your feet can be seen - and to make sure you don't slide around. Loose shoes can be dangerous! Another reason is that different brands of shoe have different sizing systems. You may be a 35 with one brand but a 39 with another. This makes ordering on the Internet or by mail-order tricky unless you select exactly the same model and make of shoe. Feet that are still growing only complicate matters.

Boys ballet shoes are either made from leather or canvas. There is not really that

much difference. For class, leather shoes are preferred. For costumes, one material may be preferable over the other for their look. Leather shoes generally last longer than canvas shoes but they are a bit more expensive. The leather is very thin and supple - this means leather shoes can stretch a bit more than canvas shoes. Canvas shoes are easier to wash and white canvas shoes can be dyed any colour for costumes. Ballet shoes come either with a full-sole or with a split-sole. With a full-sole, the material extends for the length of the foot; a split-sole shoe just has two pads of sole (one under the toe, the other under the heel). You will see professional dancers wearing both kinds of shoe. Full-sole shoes are better for younger dancers because they make the foot work harder and offer more support.

The Newcastle Dance Academy requires black shoes for class, with white shoes reserved for exams and performance.

In smaller sizes there is usually no difference between shoes for boys and girls. In larger sizes, men's and women's shoes are usually different or, at least, sized differently. It depends on the manufacturer so ask for advice when shopping. Note: different manufacturers offer slight variations in width so it is worth spending some time finding the best fit.

Question: Left/Right?

Sounds like a silly question, doesn't it? But it's not if you're not used to ballet shoes. Nearly all manufacturers' shoes are wearable on either foot. Shoes which are left/right-formed are rather specialist - if you

do come across them you will normally be able to tell by the soles.

Question: Elastics?

Elastics help keep your shoes on - and also ensure the shoe hugs the arch of the foot to give the best shape. The elastic used is a thin, flat strip about 9mm wide or so. Some people prefer a slightly wider elastic. The main things to consider are quantity, position and colour.

Question: How many?

Some people use one strip of elastic going horizontally across the foot; others use two pieces which cross over the top of the foot. There is not much difference. Some people claim that two elastics make the shoe hug the foot better - but plenty of people use only one. Some brands come with two elastics pre-sewn. You then have to sew in the other ends.

Question: Positioning?

If you are using one elastic, fold the heel of the shoe forward into the shoe and mark where the sides of the shoe crease. This is where to sew the two ends of the elastic. If you have two pre-sewn elastics they should already be attached at the heel. Slip on the shoe and cross over the elastics. The elastic crossing over to your instep should be attached at the arch's highest point. The other elastic should be sewn at the same point on the other side.

Question: Performance shoes colour?

Elastics look best when they disappear into whatever you are wearing on your feet. Black elastic for black tights, white if you are wearing white etc. Sometimes you will see people wearing elastic which matches the shoe colour. You can dye or use shoe paint to match the colour of tights.

Sewing

We recommend you use double thread to ensure a durable stitch. Make sure the elastic is sewn on the inside of the shoe and is not twisted. Never sew through the piping which contains the drawstring. After attaching one end of the elastic, slip on the shoe to work out how tight to sew the other end. The fit should be just snug and not overstretched.

The drawstring running around the top of the shoe should be drawn snug and tied off. Tie a double knot and trim the ends.

Tuck everything inside the shoe. You may like to hold the ends in place with some adhesive tape. Some people tie a bow in the drawstring but this can be bulkier - and you probably won't ever need to adjust the drawstring so it is safe to tie a double knot.

When you first start out in dance, you will find your feet will hurt. This is not your new shoes doing this, it is your feet doing things they've never had to do before. It is important to keep going with the shoes you have, and not blame your shoes for why your feet hurt. The hurt will go away as your feet get used to what they're doing.

TIGHTS



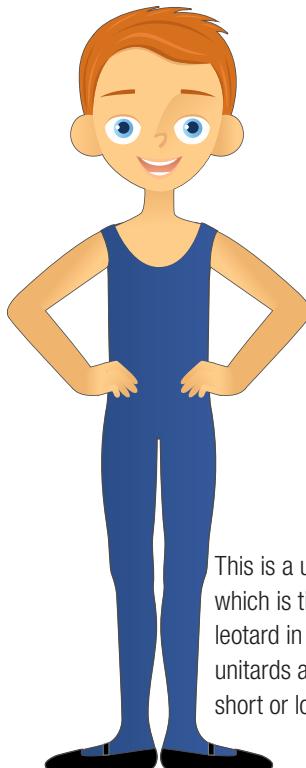
Tights are a close-fitting garment that covers the lower half of the body. Tights were invented for men and boys in the early Middle Ages, and continue to be worn today, but mostly for athletic pursuits, including dance. Tights enable the dancer to show off his muscles, the shape of his body and permit free and unrestricted movement.

Question: Do I *really* have to wear tights?

Answer: If you want to dance, then yes. It comes with the territory. It's not about making you all embarrassed, there are very real reasons to wear tights in dance. Tights not only enable easy movement, they also allow your teachers to see that you are moving the right way.

Question: Are boys tights different to girls tights?

Answer: Absolutely, categorically YES. Boys ballet tights are thicker than girls tights and completely opaque. Just so you know, sport tights for boys (e.g. Slazenger, Skins, Under-Armor) are unsuitable for ballet, because their branding and overall design can be a distraction. The Newcastle Dance Academy teaches the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) syllabus, which has specific uniform requirements. RAD tights are footless tights in a navy blue colour. Classes also permit black tights (footless, footed or stirruped), and unitards (a garment that combines tights and leotard) in either navy blue or black (footed, footless or stirruped).



This is a unitard, which is tights and leotard in one. Some unitards also feature short or long sleeves.

Boys wear their tights *over* their leotard. If you want to wear a singlet or T-shirt instead of a leotard, then make sure it is always tucked into your tights. Remember, it is always about being clean, neat and tidy. RAD tights are typically cotton, though if you prefer to wear navy blue or black lycra tights or a unitard, that is permitted too (lycra is non see-through and much lighter, which makes it better for wearing in the warmer months).

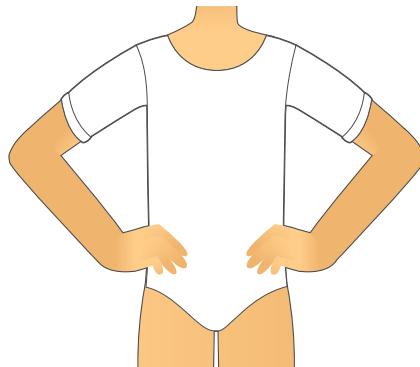
With footless tights, you should be wearing white cotton socks under your dance shoes. These can be ankle or knee high, and are worn **OVER** your tights.

When performing, and to a lesser extent during classes, it is important to keep your tights pulled right up. Nothing breaks the clean lines of your body's outlines than the crotch of your tights flapping about near your knees. Think of your tights like a colourful second skin. They should be firmly fitted all over, clear of wrinkles, and no saggy or baggy bits.

Some boys wear elastic suspenders to keep their tights up, some wear a waist belt that is rolled into the top of high-waist tights, forming a bunch when rolled down to the waist. Firmly fitting tights will keep themselves up. A unitard can't fall down because it is secured over the shoulders.

In warmer months, some students roll the lower leg of their tights up to the knee to keep their lower legs cool. An alternative is wearing lycra tights, which allows better cooling than cotton and don't need to be rolled up.

LEOTARD

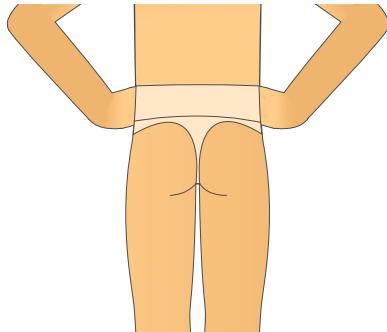
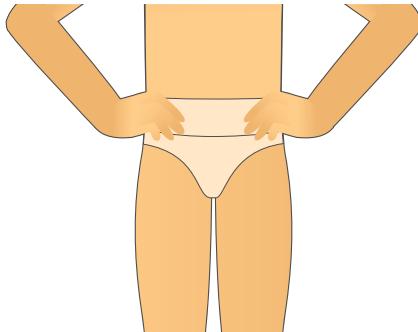


A leotard is a garment that combines a singlet (or T-shirt if sleeved) with briefs.

In dance, both boys and girls wear leotards, however boys always wear their leotard under other garments, such as shorts or tights. If you wear a leotard, it is not necessary to wear underpants underneath - the leotard is basically like underwear. The leotard should always be close-fitting, and the RAD leotard is always white. Like tights, it is about enabling your teacher to see your body and how it moves to make sure you are moving the right way. Baggy clothing doesn't help your ballet teacher at all.

For performances, it is unlikely you will be required to wear a leotard. Performance costumes for boys are usually designed without leotards in mind. If you're wearing tights, then a dance belt (also known as a "support") is the norm. If you're wearing trousers or jeans for jazz, hip-hop etc, then your normal underpants (or your dance belt) should suffice. Some students sometimes prefer to wear their dance belt under their leotard, especially when they're getting used to wearing a dance belt.

DANCE BELT



All male ballet dancers wear dance belts. A dance belt is the underwear that male dancers wear. A dance belt keeps your boy-bits out of harm's way when you're dancing. Think about it: male ballet is all about strong athletic jumps. There's lots of opening and closing of the legs at high speed like a giant pair of scissors. You don't want your bits getting caught in the way. Dance belts also offer protection from not very good ballerinas. When you start partnering, girls always get their feet in the wrong place. A dance belt will help stop you getting hurt by those stray donkey legs. If you just wore tights with nothing underneath you might feel that everyone could see your bits. You'd probably be right. The dance belt solves this problem by packaging everything up neatly so you don't feel exposed. After all, for boys, tights aren't underwear - they're outerwear!

Question: Why can't I just wear my normal boxers under my tights?

Answer: if you wear normal underwear under tights it shows through - because tights are tight. You don't want people seeing your underwear, do you? Boxers and normal briefs bunch up under tights and the

whole point of tights is to make your legs look smooth and show off your muscles. If your tights are all wrinkly it looks rubbish. Agreed? So the solution to all your trouble is a dance belt.

Question: How does it work?

Answer: Dance belts are a bit like briefs. They hold your bits in place at the front, but they have a thong back (shock!) which means nothing shows through when you're wearing tights. That's it. Clever but simple. And it really works - it takes everything you might be worried about and makes it invisible. They sometimes have a wide elastic waistband which helps support your abdominal muscles (like a weightlifter).

Question: How can that be comfortable?

Answer: It does start out a bit like having a wedgie, but even so, you won't believe us if we tell you dance belts are actually pretty comfortable, so you'll have to try for yourself. Remember, all male ballet dancers wear them! You need to make sure you get one that fits properly. If you get one too large, it won't do what it's meant to. If you get one that's too small, you risk sawing yourself in half - the *nasty* way.

Question: How do I put it on?

Answer: This is the bit they don't normally tell you. It's rather important, though. **WARNING:** the first time you wear a dance belt it will feel WEIRD. Of course - like anything new. Within 2 hours it will become the most normal thing in the world. So, probably best to spend those 2 hours wearing it at home and not in class for the first time. You basically put on a dance belt like normal briefs BUT pull the belt up as far as it will go comfortably. The waistband is meant to sit up *above* your hips. You're not a gangsta, after all. Once you've pulled it on, reach inside and scoop everything up in front so it all points skywards. That clears your bits out of the way for all your dance moves (you should also be doing this when you wear a leotard). Yes, it's meant to be quite tight - it's designed to stop things moving around down there.

Question: When do I need to start wearing one?

Answer: A dance belt is essentially just an athletic support for dance, so some dancers start when they're wearing athletic supports in sports. However, many dancers start wearing supports when they're younger - between 8 and 10 years old. Some start wearing them when they start dancing. No dancer over the age of 11 should be without a dance belt. No matter how old you are, it can be 'psychologically easier' to start young (although it's not really that big an issue for any boy who's serious about ballet). It is also quite a good idea for parents/teachers to pre-empt the dance belt issue because it's not the easiest thing to ask for. Get your parents to read this and discuss it with

them. Too young for a dance belt? Some little boys just wear ordinary briefs - some wear nothing. The former psychologically helps any 'exposure' issues - the latter helps the line issue. If you're a boxer wearer, then go straight for the dance belt.

Question: When do I wear it?

Answer: Whenever you're dancing. Always. Even if you have a wardrobe malfunction and have to take a class in tracksuit pants, wear your dance belt underneath.

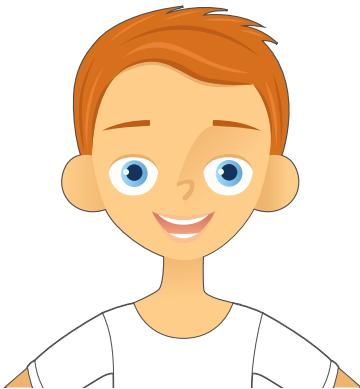
Question: What about colour?

Answer: Dance belts normally come in black, white and beige. Beige is the most common colour to wear. White dance belts are a waste of time. The idea is you wear white dance belts under white tights, but white tights are usually ever so slightly, just a tiny bit transparent. If you wear a white dance-belt underneath it risks shining through like a beacon. Your best bet under white tights is a beige dance belt that is heading for skin colour. That one won't be seen.

Question: I've done everything you say but it's still uncomfortable!

Answer: No need to panic. There are many different brands of dance belt on the market. Just like shoes or tights or cars, everyone has their favourite, so if your dance belt makes your eyes water, you can't send it back - but you can get a different one that will be more comfortable. You might look for one with a thinner waistband or a different cut at the front, for example. And you might just need to spend a bit longer getting used to it. Don't worry - everyone does get used to it in the end because, remember, all male dancers wear them!

GROOMING



Boys typically turn up to dance classes without grooming, unlike girls who have their hair in buns and so on. This is the norm and boys on that score are not really expected to change any time soon. However, it is important for dancing boys to consider grooming as an important aspect to their daily routine, as it shows a form of self discipline that teachers (and examiners and even audiences) appreciate. It also indicates to teachers that you might actually - you know - CARE about other people and how they see you, and that you might actually respect your teachers. So have a good think about spending a little time before class doing a couple of simple things to make yourself look a little less like you've just crawled out of bed after losing a wrestling match with your pillow and bedsheets.

Don't panic - we're not talking about anything radical here.

Quite simply, pull a comb through your hair, remove wristwatches, rings and necklaces, and if you wear an earring or ear-stud, try leaving it out for classes and performances.

If you have long hair, tie it back after combing it. During performances, boys tend to ignore things like hair (unlike girls who can obsess about even one tiny hair being out of place), but believe it or not it's really important to be well groomed for the stage. The costume you are wearing will have been made with much care and attention to detail. The least you can do is spend a little time complimenting that effort with some hair care (a bit of gel, combed through for example), clean teeth, hands and fingernails, and for the older boys, a little skin care to minimise those spots might be in order.

You're on stage to perform in front of an appreciative audience and not look like a grub when dancing next to gleaming, sparkling and near perfectly presented girls. Even just remembering to smile and at least LOOK like you're enjoying yourself can do wonders and impress people. Dance is a difficult discipline, where unlike sports where grimacing and grunting during exertion is the norm, dancers have to make their athleticism look effortless. This is why grooming is important, and keeping each hair in its place regardless of how much exertion is made is the goal. It can be tough, but so is anything that's worth doing. If in any doubt, check out professional dancers - they're always looking faultless and well groomed.

Question: Do I really have to wear makeup?

Answer: Yes, but only during performances on stage (that means NO to during class). Stage makeup is there to help the audience see the lines and shape of the details of your

face under the glare of stage lights. If you didn't wear makeup, your face would appear like a blob, with indistinct features making you look positively weird. All performers on stage wear makeup (just as all movie stars wear makeup, even the toughest of the tough guys). It's not about wearing makeup for the sake of wearing makeup, it's about serving the purpose of making you look good overall - from the cut and colour of your costume to your well groomed hair.

WILL BALLET MAKE ME GAY?

No, it will not make you gay.

Ballet has for a long time been associated with an idea that its men are gay because they prance around in a girly way in tights.

The truth is male dancers rarely if ever prance, and the whole tights issue is so silly as to be irrelevant (so many athletes wear tights these days you have to start to wonder about those who don't).

Also, what precisely is gay about being in a room full of beautiful young women throwing themselves at you?

If you *are* gay, then you will find more acceptance and less judgement amongst dancers than you will elsewhere, and that is why there is an association to begin with, but that kind of acceptance can be found across the performing arts community (theatre, film, music etc).

If you are not gay and someone accuses of you of being gay because you're a dancer, then they're not only ignorant, they're being a bully.

BULLIES



NO BULLIES

Being a dancing boy can be tough.

There's the schedule of classes. There's the cost of the clothing. There's the teachers yelling at you to turn out your feet properly. There's lifting girls. There's sweat and strain and bruises (it's all worth it, though).

But once all that is done and it's time to go home and go to school the next day, there's the question of bullies.

Bullies are attracted to the idea of picking on dancing boys because many bullies consider dance as 'gay' or girlish or wimpy, as if dancing is easy and only for girls or girly wimps too weak to play "normal" sports like footie (even though many dancers also play numerous sports).

The truth is, dance is one of the more difficult, challenging and athletic disciplines about, but because one of the requirements of performing is to make it look as graceful, elegant and easy as possible, most non-dancers have absolutely no idea of what's involved. Bullies are typically clueless to the fact many professional sportsmen take ballet lessons to improve their flexibility, stamina, strength and co-ordination.

Boys who choose to dance do so for a variety of reasons. They want to dance because they have lots of energy, while some see it as a great way to express themselves artistically. Some love the performing, some love the athleticism, some live for the raucous applause of the audience, while others just like the idea of being in a room full of beautiful girls. Some dance for all these reasons. Whatever the reason, many who start out at ballet are not aware of the terrible prejudice that awaits them in the hearts of bullies that may lurk outside the safety of the dance school, until it's too late.

Bullies are by and large cowards, who can't bully without having their colleagues and henchmen around them. Many bullies are jealous of people who accomplish things, be it dancing or other artistic pursuits. Many bullies are themselves the victim of bullying, and they use their bullying as a way of "dealing" with it. They're the ones who need help.

Bullies can be girls as well as boys, young or old. Some adults can be bullies. Bullies can also be a family member as well as a kid at school or in the local neighbourhood.

Some bullies just like to tease. They whine or make up stupid names or rhymes and think it funny, again usually when they are with their colleagues (and out of earshot of parents or teachers). These bullies rarely bully when there is nobody watching or paying attention.

Bullies who tease are usually the easiest to deal with, as simply ignoring them deprives them of their sport. Responding to their insults gives them ammunition to use in their teasing.

Either way, you need to tell a parent or teacher when this type of bullying occurs. Most schools have a zero tolerance approach to bullying.

Rarer but nevertheless present are the physical bullies, those who feel they need to bash up people they decide to dislike. If you have ever been assaulted by a bully, you need to tell a teacher or a parent as soon as possible.

There is no excuse for a bully to harm you. There is no valid reason why anyone can shove you, punch you, wrestle you to the ground, stomp on you, or inflict any pain, injury or suffering on you, regardless of what they say or even who they are (remember, bullies can be any age). To cause any injury to you is illegal and needs to be reported to the police. You need to tell a parent or teacher and have the matter dealt with by law enforcement as soon as possible.

A depressing fact is that many boys with potentially bright futures (and not necessarily in just dance) give up because of bullies.

To become a dancer, even if it's just for fun, requires the support of teachers, parents, friends and family. It is important you tell one or more of these people if you ever find yourself targeted by bullies. It is really important to never give in to bullies, and that includes giving up on dance. If you give up on dance, then they have won. Why hand them that triumph?

Dance because you want to, dance because you enjoy it - or even love it - and never let any bully take that away from you.

SECRET BOYS BUSINESS



“What is a dance belt?” “What sort of shoes?”

These and many other issues can be found addressed in this guide for young male dancers, presenting questions you may have about certain less well covered subjects, and are not sure where to go for answers.

brought to you by



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