

All Minds Dance Hub  
Inclusive Teaching Resource

# Ballet Class Adaptations

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*Supporting structure, precision, and artistry  
through accessible pathways*



## What this supports

These adaptations support dancers who may:

- struggle with working memory or sequencing
- need more processing time or preparation
- find stillness or rapid corrections dysregulating
- experience sensory overload from mirrors, language, or pace

The goal is **not to simplify ballet**, but to teach it in ways that reduce unnecessary load so technique can emerge clearly.

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## Key Challenges in Ballet Classes

Ballet places high demands on:

- memory and sequencing
- posture and body awareness
- terminology and language processing
- sensory regulation during stillness
- managing multiple corrections at once

When too many demands are layered together, dancers may appear tense, distracted, or disengaged when they are in reality, overloaded.

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## Practical Adaptations for Ballet Classes

### 1. Create a Clear Entry into Each Exercise

#### Why it helps

Preparation time supports alignment, coordination, and nervous system regulation.

#### What to try

- Pause briefly before each exercise
- Clearly show the starting position
- Use a longer introduction (8 counts rather than 4)
- Allow dancers to quietly mark the first movement

## 2. Chunk Barre Sequences

### Why it helps

Breaking exercises into sections reduces working memory load.

### What to try

- Teach the exercise in short sections
- Repeat each section before adding the next
- Use the same cues each time

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## 3. Reduce Language Load

### Why it helps

Terminology can overwhelm dancers with language processing differences.

### What to try

- Pair terminology with demonstration
- Use functional cues alongside names
- Repeat the same language consistently week to week

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## 4. Allow Micro-Movement During Stillness

### Why it helps

Small movements help some dancers stay regulated and organised.

### What to try

- Allow subtle weight shifts or breath adjustments
- Focus corrections on alignment, not immobility
- Avoid calling out harmless micro-movement

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## 5. Break Up Long Barre Sections

### Why it helps

Extended static work increases physical and cognitive fatigue.

### What to try

- Pair barre exercises with simple centre practice
- Change places at the barre every few exercises
- Add small travelling steps where appropriate

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## Centre Practice Adaptations

### 6. Support Balance Without Removing the Challenge

#### Why it helps

Balance relies on sensory integration, which may be less reliable for some dancers.

#### What to try

- Offer optional fingertip support initially
- Prepare in parallel before turnout
- Use a calm, fixed visual focus

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### 7. Build Turns Progressively

#### Why it helps

Turns combine balance, coordination, timing, and sensory input.

#### What to try

- Practise preparations separately
- Use slower tempos when learning
- Focus on initiation and alignment before speed
- Reduce visual clutter to support spotting

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## Allegro & Travelling Work

### 8. Clarify Pathways

#### Why it helps

Clear spatial planning reduces hesitation and anxiety.

### What to try

- Mark starting points clearly
- Walk pathways before dancing
- Keep patterns consistent before adding variation

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## 9. Reduce Performance Pressure

### Why it helps

Visibility can heighten anxiety and affect coordination.

### What to try

- Work in pairs or small groups
- Allow a “watch first” option
- Remove unnecessary urgency

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## Strengths Ballet Can Unlock

With the right teaching pathways, ballet can develop:

- strong body awareness
- pattern recognition
- musical phrasing
- attention to detail
- disciplined focus without fear
- expressive clarity

Many neurodivergent dancers thrive within ballet’s structure when it is predictable, supportive, and clearly communicated.

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### Key Takeaway for Teachers

#### Ballet does not need to be softened to be inclusive.

When teachers adjust *how* ballet is taught, dancers gain access to its full technical and artistic depth, without compromising standards, integrity, or artistry.