

Focus & Engagement

*Supporting attention, regulation, and participation
in neurodiverse dance classes*



What This Supports

These strategies support dancers who may:

- appear unfocused while still engaged
- need movement or fidgeting to concentrate
- struggle when attention is treated as stillness
- disengage under pressure or overload
- fluctuate in focus depending on energy or sensory input

Focus is not about control. It is about **supporting the nervous system**.

Understanding Focus in Neurodivergent Dancers

Neurodivergent attention is often:

- interest-based
- energy-dependent
- influenced by sensory input
- variable from moment to moment

Focus may look like movement, looking away, fidgeting, or asking repeated questions. These can be signs of regulation, not disengagement.

Practical Strategies for Supporting Focus & Engagement

1. Reduce Cognitive Load

Why it helps

Holding too much information at once overwhelms processing.

What to try

- Teach one element at a time
 - Avoid changing multiple variables simultaneously
 - Keep verbal cues short and clear
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2. Chunk Learning into Small Steps

Why it helps

Completing one task at a time builds confidence and focus.

What to try

- Break sequences into small sections
 - Celebrate completion before adding the next step
 - Repeat chunks predictably
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3. Use Multi-Sensory Teaching

Why it helps

Multiple input pathways support understanding.

What to try

- Say it, show it, do it
 - Use floor markers or gesture cues
 - Let dancers feel the movement before refining it
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4. Allow Movement-Based Regulation

Why it helps

Stillness can reduce focus for many dancers.

What to try

- Allow quiet fidgeting or stimming
 - Build in movement resets
 - Avoid forcing prolonged stillness
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5. Use Time Anchors and Predictable Pacing

Why it helps

Clear timing reduces anxiety and disengagement.

What to try

- Use countdowns
 - Keep section lengths consistent
 - Signal when an activity will end
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6. Provide Clear Focus Anchors

Why it helps

Vague instructions like “focus” lack direction.

What to try

- Offer one focus point at a time
 - Use concrete anchors such as breath, pathway, or musical accent
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7. Use Repetition with Purpose

Why it helps

Meaningful repetition builds motor memory and confidence.

What to try

- Repeat with small variations
 - Explain why repetition is happening
 - Keep repetition supportive, not punitive
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8. Use Encouragement, Not Pressure

Why it helps

Pressure activates threat responses that block learning.

What to try

- Praise effort and curiosity
 - Normalise mistakes
 - Offer reassurance
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Strengths Focus-Supportive Teaching Unlocks

When focus is supported rather than forced, dancers often show:

- longer engagement
- calmer classes
- improved learning retention
- stronger movement quality
- increased confidence

Focus thrives in **safe, connected environments**.

Key Takeaway for Teachers

Focus is not about demanding attention. It is about **creating the conditions where attention can exist**.

When teachers support regulation, clarity, and autonomy, dancers stay engaged, learn more deeply, and move with greater confidence.