

All Minds Dance Hub
Inclusive Teaching Resource

Lyrical/Contemporary Class Adaptations

*Supporting expression, emotional safety, and creative clarity
through grounded pathways*



What This Supports

These adaptations support dancers who may:

- find abstract imagery or metaphor confusing
- feel overwhelmed by emotional or performative expectations
- need clearer structure within improvisation
- experience sensory discomfort with floorwork or touch
- require time and safety to access expression authentically

Lyrical and contemporary dance do not need to be made smaller or less expressive to be inclusive. They need **clarity, emotional safety, and supported exploration**.

Key Challenges in Lyrical / Contemporary Classes

These styles place high demands on:

- emotional regulation and vulnerability
- interoception (internal body awareness)
- sensory integration
- imagination and abstraction
- self-monitoring and performance presence

When expectations are vague or layered too quickly, dancers may appear disconnected, hesitant, or resistant, when in fact they are overwhelmed.

Practical Adaptations for Lyrical / Contemporary Classes

1. Use Clear, Concrete Language Before Imagery

Why it helps

Abstract imagery can be confusing or anxiety-provoking if dancers do not yet understand the physical movement pathway.

What to try

- Start with clear physical cues (for example, shift weight, soften knees)
 - Introduce imagery only once movement is secure
 - Explain imagery literally if needed, linking it to physical action
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2. Offer Multiple Interpretations of Imagery

Why it helps

There is no single correct emotional response to movement.

What to try

- Offer more than one image or sensation for the same phrase
 - Allow dancers to choose what resonates
 - Avoid correcting emotional expression unless it affects safety or intent
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Emotional Safety & Regulation

3. Separate Technique from Emotional Demand

Why it helps

Accessing emotional depth while learning new movement can overload the nervous system.

What to try

- Learn choreography in a neutral, non-performative way first
 - Introduce emotional intent once movement pathways are secure
 - Use language such as “movement first, meaning second”
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4. Normalise Neutral Expression

Why it helps

Some dancers experience emotion internally or express it subtly.

What to try

- Accept restrained or minimal expression as valid
 - Avoid forcing facial expression or visible emotion
 - Focus feedback on movement quality and intention
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Floorwork & Sensory Considerations

5. Offer Alternatives to Floor Contact

Why it helps

Sustained tactile input from the floor can be uncomfortable or distressing for some dancers.

What to try

- Offer kneeling or seated alternatives
 - Allow mats, layers, or clothing adjustments
 - Avoid forcing full body floor contact when alternatives meet the same intent
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6. Build Floorwork Progressively

Why it helps

Moving closer to the floor can feel destabilising without preparation.

What to try

- Introduce floorwork gradually
 - Teach entries and exits clearly
 - Practise transitions separately before full phrases
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Structure Within Improvisation

7. Provide Clear Frameworks for Improvisation

Why it helps

Open-ended tasks can feel overwhelming without boundaries.

What to try

- Set clear movement tasks (levels, pathways, qualities)
 - Use time limits for exploration
 - Anchor improvisation to sections of music
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8. Allow Observation as Participation

Why it helps

Some dancers need time to watch and internally process before moving.

What to try

- Allow watching before joining
 - Frame observation as active learning
 - Avoid pressure to “just move”
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Space, Dynamics & Transitions

9. Slow Transitions Between Qualities

Why it helps

Sudden shifts in dynamics can be dysregulating.

What to try

- Gradually shift energy levels
 - Signal changes verbally or musically
 - Allow dancers to find transitions at their own pace
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10. Reduce Mirror Dependence

Why it helps

Mirrors can pull focus away from internal sensation and expression.

What to try

- Teach sections facing away from mirrors
 - Offer brief moments with eyes closed
 - Use sensation-based feedback rather than visual correction
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Strengths Lyrical / Contemporary Can Unlock

With the right support, these styles can develop:

- deep body awareness
- authentic expression
- emotional resilience
- creativity and individuality
- intuitive musicality
- connection between movement and meaning

Many neurodivergent dancers bring profound depth and originality to lyrical and contemporary dance when supported safely.

Key Takeaway for Teachers

Lyrical and contemporary dance flourish when dancers feel **safe, grounded, and respected**.

When teachers provide clarity, structure, and emotional choice, dancers are free to explore movement and expression in ways that are genuine and sustainable.