

All Minds Dance Hub  
Inclusive Teaching Resource

# Lyrical/Contemporary

## Class Adaptations

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*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**.

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## 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.

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## 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

## 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.

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### 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.