



## Bridging the Mental Health – Performance Gap in Dance

### ***- Workshops and Series Overview -***

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#### **Mental Performance Workshop Series (4 weekly, 90-minute sessions)**

*Mindset training for performance built on the foundations of mental health*

#### **Building Dancers for the Long Game**

*These four weekly workshops develop the mental skills that separate good from exceptional—and build humans who carry resilience, confidence, and self-awareness well beyond the studio. We bridge the gap between mental health and performance, teaching young dancers that taking care of yourself and pursuing excellence aren't competing priorities—they're inseparable. Sustainable excellence means showing up at your best more often, recovering smarter, and building careers in dance that make you better, not broken.*

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#### **Workshop Outlines:**

##### **1. Know Yourself, Know Your Artistry**

*Understanding what makes you tick—your strengths AND what throws you off*

You can't get better if you don't know yourself. What are you naturally good at? What lights you up when you move? What completely derails you? This session helps you figure out your strengths as a dancer and ensemble member, and also what triggers frustration, doubt, or distraction.

You'll learn to set goals that actually mean something (not just placements), debrief with yourself and your teacher in ways that lead to real growth, and use journaling to track patterns you might otherwise miss. Because self-awareness isn't just feel-good stuff—it's how you get smarter about your artistry and stop making the same mistakes over and over.

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##### **2. Finding Your Zone and Staying There**

*Managing your energy so you can perform when it matters*

Your best performance isn't about being calm or hyped—it's about finding the right intensity for you and knowing how to get there when the pressure's on. Some dancers need to settle their



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nerves; others need to wake themselves up. Either way, you've got more control than you think.

Using breathwork and mindfulness, we'll teach you to read what your body's doing, dial your energy up or down as needed, and perform with butterflies in your stomach instead of waiting until they're gone. You'll learn how to prepare before competitions, reset after mistakes, and stay solid when everything feels chaotic. We'll also talk about how ensemble members can help each other stay steady and what you actually need from your teacher in big moments.

Managing yourself under pressure is what separates good from exceptional.

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### 3. Mastering Your Mind

*Controlling your thoughts, sharpening your focus, building real confidence*

That voice in your head saying you're not good enough? It's loud, and it's usually lying. Your mind wandering to the audience, your last mistake, or what people are thinking? That's killing your performance.

We'll show you how to notice when your self-talk is dragging you down, challenge the thoughts that aren't helping, and build an inner voice that's tough and supportive. You'll also learn to control where your attention goes—catching yourself when you drift and getting back to what matters. We'll practice using imagery (mental rehearsal) to prepare for competition and build confidence before you even step onstage.

Confidence isn't something you're born with. It's built through how you talk to yourself, where you put your focus, and who you choose to listen to. Learn to use ensemble members who believe in you and teachers who push you to grow.

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### 4. Preparing for Peak Performance

*Planning ahead so you're ready when competition day hits*

Competition day doesn't start when you walk onstage—it starts with how you prepare. This session teaches you to build routines that calm your nerves, sharpen your focus, and help you trust yourself.

You'll create your own prep plan for the night before, the morning of, and those final moments before you perform—covering your warm-up, your mental game, and your physical readiness. You'll also learn how to tell teachers what you need, use ensemble members to stay grounded when you're nervous, and tune out distractions that mess with your head.

Showing up prepared—body and mind—is how you perform with confidence and set yourself up to go the distance.

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## Studio-Wide Culture Workshop (3hrs or 2x1.5hrs)

### Communication That Builds Championship Studios

*For teachers, studio directors, and dancers: Creating culture through real connection*

*Aligning values with actions. Defining expectations. Planning for how to get back on track if behaviours don't align with values. All of these require clear and consistent communication. It requires awareness of what others need to be their best selves. How you talk to each other—in class, at competitions, in the dressing room—shapes everything. This workshop brings dancers, teachers, and staff together to build the communication that turns individuals into an ensemble that actually trusts each other.*

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#### We'll work on:

- **Co-creating culture:** Making sure your studio values show up in how you actually act. Creating plans for when people act in ways that go against the values.
- **Talking under pressure:** Staying clear when the stakes are high and emotions are running hot
- **Celebrating what's real:** Recognizing what people bring without fake hype
- **Supporting through the hard stuff:** What to say when dancers or friends are struggling or doubting themselves
- **Bouncing back as a group:** Handling disappointments, learning from obstacles, and keeping belief in each other alive

*The best studios communicate with honesty, care, and courage—especially when it's uncomfortable. Championships get built on relationships and alignment, not just talent.*

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## Parent and Teacher Workshop (2.5hrs)

(Mental Health Literacy / Mental Health First Aid)

### Recognizing the Red Flags

*Responding to mental health concerns in training and competition environments*

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*That dancer who used to love class but now drags their feet? The perfectionist who loses it over one mistake? The anxious dancer obsessed with what everyone thinks? The restless, unfocused student who can't seem to lock in? Learn to spot when normal stress becomes something bigger—and what to do about it.*

*This session gives parents and teachers the tools to recognize early warning signs, have tough conversations without making it worse, and get young dancers the right support before things spiral.*

#### We'll cover:

- The difference between competition-day nerves and real anxiety, between working hard and dangerous perfectionism
- Spotting when shifts in mood, energy, eating, sleeping, or pulling away mean something deeper is going on
- Crisis vs. emergency: When you need help right now vs. when you watch and support
- How to connect dancers with help in ways that don't break trust
- Balancing high standards with actually caring about the human

**For parents:** Learn to pick up on subtle signs of distress, the right questions to ask, how to listen so they'll actually talk and when it's time to get a professional involved.

**For teachers:** Build a studio culture where asking for help shows strength, not weakness. Where getting mental health support doesn't mean lowering your competitive bar. Where taking care of your mental health is modeled as a foundation to best performances. Where you care about dancers' long-term success and health throughout life.

*No one can perform well long-term if they're not well. Period.*

*High performers tend to mask emotions and would prefer to put on a "performance" to please everyone else. It's our duty of care to learn how to notice the early warning signs of mental health concerns and prevent them from worsening.*

*Because we're not just building dancers. We're building humans.*



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## Parent Workshop (1.5hrs)

### **Beyond "How Was Class?": Connecting With Your Dancer**

*What to say after class, competitions, wins, disappointments and everything in between*

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*The conversations you have with your child on the drive home, at dinner, or before bed matter way more than you think. What you say—and how you say it—shapes how they feel about dance, mistakes, and themselves.*

*This workshop helps parents turn everyday conversations from drilling or critiquing into actual connection and learning.*

#### **You'll learn:**

- How to read your dancer's mood and match it (sometimes they want to talk; sometimes they need quiet)
- Questions that open them up instead of shutting them down ("What did you notice?" beats "Why didn't you...?")
- How to celebrate effort and progress without pretending results don't matter
- When to give perspective and when to just listen
- How to handle competition disappointments, slumps, and setbacks without fixing everything or brushing it off
- The difference between pushing for excellence and pushing them toward burnout

*You can't control their performance. But you can control whether your conversations bring you closer or push you apart. If they help them bounce back or suffer more in silence. If they soak in the wins to build confidence or dismiss their wins as 'not good enough.' The goal isn't just better dancers. It's raising tough, confident humans who know how to handle pressure, deal with disappointment, and keep perspective long after dance is over.*

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## Teacher Workshop (2.5hrs)

### Unlocking Potential: Teaching the Person, Not Just the Dancer

*How to motivate your dancers to give it their all*

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*The best teachers don't just teach technique, they unlock something in people. This workshop gives you actionable communication tools, rooted in motivational interviewing and performance psychology, to help young dancers find their own drive and take ownership of their development.*

#### You'll learn:

##### **Working with resistance, not against it**

When dancers dig in their heels or shut down, pushing harder usually backfires. Learn to roll with resistance—exploring their hesitation with curiosity rather than judgment and helping them find their own way forward instead of forcing compliance.

##### **Asking questions that build thinking dancers**

Socratic questioning helps dancers solve problems for themselves instead of waiting to be told what to do. We'll practice questions that unlock insight, develop independent thinking, and build the decision-making skills that show up in pressure situations.

##### **Having hard conversations without breaking trust**

Accountability without connection is just criticism. Learn to address performance gaps, effort concerns, and behavioral issues in ways that challenge dancers while strengthening the relationship. Because sustainable excellence requires both high standards and genuine care for the person.

##### **Helping dancers discover their 'why'**

Trophies and titles only motivate so far. Learn to help dancers connect with what genuinely drives them—their values, their identity, who they want to become. Process over outcome. Intrinsic motivation over external pressure. Dancers who want it for themselves, not because they fear disappointing you.

##### **Leveraging strengths to unlock best performances**

Stop only fixing weaknesses. Every dancer has something they're naturally good at. Learn to identify and build on strengths—creating confidence and competence that elevates everything else. Give people the benefit of the doubt, assume best intent, and watch what becomes possible when dancers feel seen for what they bring.

*This isn't about being soft or lowering standards. It's about teaching in ways that develop autonomy, competence, and genuine drive—not just compliance. Because the dancers who perform best long-term aren't the ones who fear letting you down. They're the ones who've discovered what they're capable of and want it for themselves.*

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## Important Information - Dance Workshops

### Trust Us

These workshops are not just training. They bring together decades of experience from Dr. Wheeler and her team. As experts who have lived and taught others how to *Bridge the Mental Health-Performance Gap*. Who have engaged hundreds of audiences. Who bring actionable strategies, not just theory. For more information about Dr. Wheeler, please visit: [www.drheatherwheeler.com](http://www.drheatherwheeler.com)

### Seeing Everything as Investment

We believe that dance is an incubator for developing the humans we want as future leaders. Investing in something that not only helps dancers unlock peak potential in their artistry but also helps them develop the basic skills to be better humans is something we think you'll agree is worth investing in. We also believe that your studio families will see it that way too. Especially if you make it a priority.

### Multi-Workshop Packages

Studios that invest in multiple workshops receive reduced pricing. When you commit to building a comprehensive mental health and performance culture—addressing dancers, parents, and teachers—we recognize that investment with bundled rates tailored to your needs.

### Customized Programming

Every studio has unique needs, challenges, and goals. These workshops can be tailored to address your specific culture, competitive level, age ranges, and areas of focus. Whether you need content adjusted for pre-competitive dancers, support around specific mental health concerns, or programming that integrates with your existing studio values—we'll create something that fits.

### In-Person Delivery Preferred

While virtual delivery is available, in-person workshops create deeper connection, allow for more effective experiential learning, and build stronger studio culture. The impact of embodied practices—breathwork, movement, and group connection—is significantly enhanced when we're together in the same space.

### Ongoing Consultation

The real impact of any workshop comes with translating the knowledge to action. We offer ongoing consultation for "after the workshop" so that studios can troubleshoot the skills in action. While all workshops include gathering feedback from attendees, which is summarized and shared with studio directors or other key staff, it is always helpful to iteratively take that feedback and adjust as needed. Let us know if you would like to consider hiring us as consultants for a 6-12 month period to support this important part of learning for your staff and dancers.

### Ready to Build Excellence That Lasts?

Let's design a workshop package that meets your studio where you are and takes you where you want to go. Contact us to discuss your needs and explore how we can work together to bridge the gap between mental health and performance in your dance community.



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