

## Creating A Healthy Training Environment

### PRINT IT! A WORKSHEET FOR PARENTS

## ENCOURAGING EXCELLENCE WITHOUT BECOMING A STAGE PARENT—**A.F.F.I.R.M.**

**Give Affection** regardless of performance outcome. Children need to know that their failures and successes don't affect parental support, love or acceptance. Unconditional parental love gives kids a safe haven from which to launch lofty dreams and ambitions. Conversely, children who believe that mom or dad values them more with every ribbon and trophy will most likely buckle under the weight of unrealistic expectations. Express unconditional love by communicating to your children that your love is based on who they are rather than what they accomplish. The pursuit of excellence is then transformed from a daunting task to a realistic goal.

**Be Focused**, but don't coach. It is the parents' job to develop the child and the coach's job to develop the dancer. Stay away from detailed, technical discussions about performance. Instead, encourage your child to establish good and realistic goal-setting habits.

**Be Flexible.** At the first sign of success, single-minded parents place their budding dancers on the fast track without taking time to find out the child's goals and objectives—and without discussing the time frame with the teacher! Allow your agenda to be set by what is best for your child's long-term health and well being, not by short-term goals. Being flexible enables both you and your child to enjoy the journey more fully.

**Interact** without dominating the conversation. A supportive parent listens more and talks less. Parents provide great comfort for children by creating a safe environment in which children know it is acceptable to express true feelings of loss and disappointment. A key element in establishing that safe environment is learning to listen. Listen for descriptive words that express how your children feel about themselves and their performances. By listening, you communicate that their thoughts and feelings are worthy of expression and you respect their experience.

**Reframe.** It's the parents' role to provide perspective. Remind your children of the bigger picture, which includes long-term goals, and other aspects of their life such as academics, friendships, family, health and spirituality. Your guidance and feedback affirms that dance is only one aspect of a multidimensional life. This truth serves as a valuable balance to the pressures of competition.

**Model.** Parents are some of the most powerful role models for children. Kids learn valuable coping skills watching mom and dad deal with difficult situations. Live your own life with integrity by insuring that your actions correspond with your values and beliefs. When you make mistakes, admit your errors, and explain to your child the more appropriate response. Your personal life experiences can provide powerful learning opportunities for your children.