



Getting Started

We want to ensure that you get off to the best start possible. To help, we've outlined the following information that explains more about our program, how it came about, what it encompasses and most importantly, what it accomplishes.

Goals of the program

The vision of *Yes, You Can Dance!* is to make partner dancing accessible to special needs teens and adults. In class, students not only learn the basics of partner dancing, they practice social skills, develop friendships with their volunteer partners and other students, and exercise their bodies and minds.

Development of the program

The program was designed by professional ballroom dance teachers and educators of students with special needs. While retaining the structure of a typical ballroom dance class, we've tailored our programs to meet the unique needs of our students, based on the input of classroom teachers who prepare those students for success in the classroom and in the ballroom.

Format of the program

The *Yes, You Can Dance!* curriculum is structured around one-hour classes once a week for a six-week session. You can tailor the number of classes per session to fit your needs. At each class, there is one professional dance instructor and a one-to-one ratio of students to dance volunteer partners. Volunteers have undergone training and partner with each student as they dance. The instructor teaches the dance steps and the volunteer partners provide personal support.





Getting to Know the Students

For *Yes, You Can Dance!*, our primary focus is each student's enjoyment. Our approach is to encourage their mobility and social engagement. Perfecting dance steps is secondary. It is very important to know your students and to be prepared in your instruction of the class.

Key Points

- Be aware of your students' personal limitations so you can promote their success
- Set reasonable expectations for your students' progress
- Feel at ease interacting with your students

You will likely be teaching students who are facing a wide array of intellectual and developmental challenges. Remember that every student is unique. Expect to get to know them the same way you get to know any new acquaintance. The more you interact, the more comfortable you and your student will be during class.

While each student is different, there are some commonalities that will help you know what to expect. We have provided some facts you need to focus on when interacting with students with Down syndrome, Autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Key Questions



What are students like in class?

What challenges do people with Autism or Down syndrome face in a dance class?

Why do some students avoid looking at me?

Are there changes I should make in my teaching to promote my students' success?



The Merengue

Of the three dances taught, the Merengue seems to be the easiest for dancers with no prior experience. The following lesson plan outlines the five Merengue patterns that will allow dancers to move around the floor, avoid obstacles in their way, and provide variety in their dance.

Key Questions



What patterns are appropriate for my students?

What do I teach first?

What do I do if they are not executing the step correctly?

Merengue Steps

Merengue is danced in practice frame, although some steps transition to double handhold. The music is 4/4 time with four consecutive heavy downbeats per measure. In this dance, some steps stay in place and some travel. There is no set pattern or direction of travel. Encourage your dancers to look for open areas of the floor and dance to them.

1. Straight Basic

Man's Part

- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot

Lady's Part

- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

Tips

Every time the feet touch the floor, the dancer should transfer his/her full weight to that foot. Encourage students to transfer weight by shifting their frame slightly towards the foot that needs to hold the weight.

Repeat 3 more times for a total of 8 steps

2. Turning Basic

Man's Part

- Small side step LEFT foot, turning LEFT
- Together RIGHT foot, no turn

Lady's Part

- Larger side step RIGHT foot, turning RIGHT
- Together LEFT foot, no turn

Tips

It doesn't matter how far around the couple turns, as long as they are turning in the correct direction.

Repeat 3 more times for a total of 8 steps



3. Separation

Man's Part

- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot
- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot

Lady's Part

- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot
- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

Tips

Arms slide from practice position to double handhold position as partners move away from each other. They slide back to practice hold as partners move toward each other again.

- Backward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot, extending arms forward to lead partner to move backward also

- Backward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

- Backward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot

- Backward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

- Forward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot, moving arms in to lead partner to move forward also

- Forward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

- Forward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot

- Forward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

This step uses four measures of music, for a total of 16 steps

4. Separation with Underarm Turn

Man's Part

- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot
- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot

- Backward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot, extending arms forward to lead partner to move backward also

- Backward LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot, lifting Lady's arm with your LEFT hand just above her eye level.

- Forward LEFT foot, bringing your RIGHT hand between you and your partner, parallel to your waistline. Let go with your RIGHT hand.

- Together RIGHT foot

- Forward LEFT foot, starting to bring LEFT hand back to dance position

- Together RIGHT foot, LEFT hand back in dance position

Lady's Part

- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot
- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

- Backward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

- Backward RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot. You will feel your RIGHT arm lifted up - open your RIGHT elbow as well.

- Forward RIGHT foot with $\frac{1}{4}$ turn. Your LEFT hand is brought through between the couple, creating the RIGHT turn.

- Together LEFT foot with $\frac{1}{4}$ turn

- Forward RIGHT foot with $\frac{1}{4}$ turn

- Together LEFT foot with $\frac{1}{4}$ turn, returning hands to dance position.

Tips

For male student/female mentor pair
If the student isn't coming forward again as you turn, you can keep your arm a little away from him so he is encouraged to step forward when he should.

For male mentor/female student pair
It might take longer than four steps for her to turn around initially. You can let her do a six-step turn if you need to.

This step uses four measures of music, for a total of 16 steps



5. Traveling Underarm Turn

Man's Part

- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT foot, lifting LEFT arm just above her eye level
- Side step LEFT foot, bringing your RIGHT hand between you and your partner, parallel to your waistline. Let go with your RIGHT hand.
- Together RIGHT foot, keeping LEFT arm lifted and starting to draw a small clockwise halo over partner's head with LEFT hand.

- Side step LEFT, with LEFT arm still lifted and LEFT hand still turning clockwise
- Together RIGHT foot, lowering LEFT hand back to dance position.
- Side step LEFT foot
- Together RIGHT

Lady's Part

- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot. You will feel your RIGHT arm lifted up – open up your RIGHT elbow as well.
- Forward RIGHT foot, achieved by turning ¼ turn under your arm.
- Backward LEFT foot, achieved by turning ½ turn in the same direction

- Side step RIGHT foot, achieved by turning ¼ turn in the same direction
- Together LEFT foot, arms back to dance position
- Side step RIGHT foot
- Together LEFT foot

Tips

The biggest challenge in this step is to encourage the male students to keep stepping to the side while the lady turns. Lady mentors should make sure they keep their hand firmly toward the direction of travel, to encourage their partner to keep stepping.

This step uses two measures of music, for a total of 8 steps