



When will I get my pointe shoes?
By Jacqueline Hill

Dancing *en pointe* is something many young girls dream about.
When will I be the one to get my shoes?

There are many factors that play into whether a dancer is ready to move to this next level in ballet. Dancing *en pointe* requires tremendous strength and skill. Pointe shoes aren't for everyone and it's important to know if and when your child is ready.

Young girls usually begin dancing *en pointe* between the ages of eleven and thirteen. Before this, their bones have not ossified sufficiently and serious foot problems can result. Fully developed bones are not the only issue. Muscles in the ankles, legs, arches, pelvic area, and abdominals must also be strong enough to bear the stress of learning pointe work. Weak and untrained muscles are common reasons why injuries occur.

It is important to know that dancing *en pointe* is not something that can be dictated by age or grade level. Several years of proper training is essential and placement requires careful evaluation of the student by their instructor. Pointe shoes should not be used as an incentive to keep a student in ballet classes.

Once your child is ready, the preparation is lengthy and it is a gradual process. Students should begin with brief periods of strengthening exercises at the *barre* for a minimum of 6 months. They may then be allowed to attempt center floor work. Progressing to *en pointe* takes time and very close supervision by an instructor with extensive experience. Some students may need to spend more than a year at the *barre*. Some may never actually be strong enough to work center floor, or perform ballet *en pointe*.

Parents should be aware of studios that place every student *en pointe* once they reach a certain level/age. Instructors should be honest with you about your child's ability - *en pointe* is not something that all dancers will excel at. For the dancer's safety, every dancer will require individual attention because every dancer is different.

Learning to dance *en pointe* is a long and detailed process so encourage your dancer to be patient. It is a very rewarding accomplishment and being able to do it properly, well, and injury free is a great feeling!

Watch for our next article on buying your first pair of pointe shoes.

Happy New Year! Spend 2007 dancing it up at ELITE Dance Studios!