



## **The “Alternate” Point of View**

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Having alternates can be beneficial for you dance team. If someone that is dancing in a routine falls ill, gets injured, or is unable to attend the performance at the last minute, an alternate can step in to that team member's position. This prevents the team from having to reset formations, change visuals, and switch choreography right before stepping onto the performance floor. On the other hand, having alternates can be difficult to deal with. Many young dancers struggle with the comprehension that they are still a part of a team even if they aren't performing all of the time. It is important as a coach or captain to choose the performances that alternates are used for wisely. Keep in mind that parents want to see their dancers perform as much as possible. Instances that may not be conducive to having alternates are: parades, on the sidelines or in the stands, end of the year showcases, and small community events. Alternates are typically used for large performances and competitions.

If you as a coach are considering implementing an alternate system there are a few things to keep in mind. Alternates on a team can be determined in a couple of different ways. One is to take your lowest scoring dancers from tryouts and designate them as alternates for the season from the very beginning. This type of established alternate typically will perform in sideline routines, in the stands, and in parades, but will not be given a spot for other performances. Having a couple of team members as established alternates can be helpful as extra dancers for the sidelines but be sure to clarify whether or not they will be eligible at some point for other performances so they know how hard they need to work on those routines. Usually coaches will set up goals that the established alternate has to accomplish, such as; mastering fouette turns or executing toe touches, etc. before they are able to be considered for a performance position. A dancer that is an established alternate can have difficulty feeling as though they are a part of the team so it is important to include them at team functions as much as possible.

A second way to designate alternates on your team is to audition for individual performances and only placing those in formation that make the cut. The dancers that aren't ready would still work to improve on that particular routine while the team practices to prepare for that performance. This method of alternate selection is the most popular amongst teams that use alternates regularly for several reasons. One is that depending on the styles of routines that your team performs, one dancer that is placed as an alternate for a jazz routine for example, will probably not be an alternate for a hip hop style routine as well. Therefore that one dancer will not be sitting out for all performances, just the ones that are a style they may struggle with. Another reason the audition per performance method works well is that it keeps your dancers in check about their skill level. They know what areas they struggle with if they aren't placed in that particular routine. In turn, they will work

more on that style so they can get to the level they need to be at to perform. This alternate method also helps create healthy competition between teammates. It forces team members to work hard for each performance and tends to alleviate the issue of having lazy dancers because they know they won't be in a routine unless they work for it.

Designating alternates can help coaches continue to motivate their dancers. Once performers have been chosen, they should be told how hard they need to work to keep their performance positions. If they miss a practice without reason or aren't working as hard as they should be, a coach has the ability to remove that dancer and put an alternate in their place. Knowing this can help your dancers to push themselves continuously instead of becoming complacent in their position. Usually a dancer will only have to be pulled once for laziness and then it doesn't happen again. This is a great reason to keep encouraging your alternates to work hard because they may have the opportunity to go in. Continue to push your team and help your alternates by taking the time at practice to rotate alternates into position so they get to experience being in the routine. Be sure alternates know why they were placed as such by telling them what about their performance needs to improve so they can continue to work on those areas.

If alternates are not something that your program has used in the past, make sure that dance team members and parents are aware of your plans to use alternates and the purpose behind it. Your team should always have the best representing your program. Having alternates waiting in the wings can give your team the support it needs to do their best while giving the coach the assurance that if an out of ordinary incident occurs that a back-up plan is in place that will cause minimal stress on the dancers as they deal with the situation that has arisen.