



# Dance Mom Survival Guide

For Westchester Performing Arts Studio

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The 2023 Mini Comp moms

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## Overview

Welcome to competitive dance! This guide is meant for new WPAS dance moms (and dance dads, dance grandparents, and others — we use “dance moms” as a shorthand only!). Please consider this an “unofficial” guide — a collection of things we learned over time as we progressed on our journey from “clueless” to “getting close to competent” dance moms! The guide is geared more toward those with younger dancers — older dancers are probably a bit more self-sufficient (though we aren’t there yet with our kids so maybe this is just wishful thinking!) and their competition days/schedules also look different if they have solos, etc. We hope you find this brief guide helpful! There are also lots of “dance mom blogs” and explainers online with more details. Each dance competition company also has helpful information for parents on their websites to help you learn the ins and outs of categories, scoring, awards, etc.

## Hair & Makeup

We are starting with this because it’s definitely one place where a quick primer and “start-up” guide may be helpful!

### Hair

WPAS will specify the hair style for your dancer’s routine(s). Here are a few tips we learned along the way:

- Gel is your friend. Hairstyling for dance competitions in general can best be described as “precise” — flyaways are frowned upon. Some good gels are [Aussie Instant Freeze](#) and [Eco Style Krystal](#).
- Of course, you’ll want hairspray too. Some blogs recommend the brand [SexyHair](#).
- We haven’t tried it yet but [hair finishing sticks](#) look pretty useful too.
- Using a boar bristle brush ([like this](#)) helps to make a smoother style compared to plastic brushes with wider-set bristles.
- You’ll need good hair ties / ponytail holders that match your dancer’s hair color. [These ones](#) by Goody stay in well.
- Bobby pins — you’ll want some big ones and small ones, and bun Bobby pins if you’re doing a bun. No real magic to this.
- For buns, your life will be easier (and bun nicer) if you use a [bun donut](#) (along with a big hair tie and lots of Bobby pins) or a [bun maker](#)
- If your dancer needs a “high ponytail,” they mean \*high\* — get those things up on the top of their head. Then any hairpiece placed in front of the ponytail will be visible to the audience (and judges!)

- Hairpieces get jammed in with multiple Bobby pins and need to be super secure. Get ready to hear “but it hurrtrts” at least once or twice.

## Makeup

Below is the general “WPAS style” for makeup. WPAS will let you know about any other special makeup requirements for your dancer’s routine(s) as well as regarding if your dancer’s team will wear earrings or anything else special (in general WPAS style is stud earrings only, if the dancer is wearing earrings). Please always defer to specific instructions from WPAS! Don’t forget to remove any colored nail polish before the competitions.

### Stage Makeup for Recital:

Red lipstick

Pink blush

Mascara

Eyeliner

Silver and pink eye shadow (silver on bottom - pink on upper)

GLITTER!

\*\*\*DIAMOND STUD EARRINGS ONLY\*\*\*

\*\*\*CLEAR, NUDE OR PALE PINK NAILS ONLY (FEET AND HANDS)\*\*\*



Here are some of our favorite tried and tested makeup suggestions for the WPAS style. These tend to be long lasting, lower priced options — if you share makeup with your dancer maybe you'd want something higher end. :)

- Lipstick - liquid lipstick stays on better than tube lipstick. [Maybelline Super Stay Matte Ink](#) in the color Dancer is a bright red that really stays on. The matching lip liner (recommended) is [Maybelline very cherry red](#). One helpful tip is to “prepare” lips before putting on lipstick by “exfoliating” gently with a washcloth then apply a clear chapstick.
- Blush - liquid/gel blush [like this one](#) tends to last longer than the powder. Adding some powder blush on top can help smooth / even things out if needed.
- Eye shadow - here's a nice [pink palette](#) and [silver palette](#). Disposable applicators are useful and cheap rather than having to wash.
- Eye liner (black) - unless you have a very steady hand you'll probably want to avoid liquid liner and use a \*soft\* eyeliner stick like [this one from NYX](#) (not a pencil that requires sharpening, which hurts to apply).
- Mascara (black) - waterproof / smudge proof like [Maybelline Full N Soft](#) waterproof mascara.
- Body Glitter for arms, chest, back (ask WPAS first whether your dancer's team should use) - [Unicorn Snot](#) glitter gel.
- For older girls you might also look at foundation, concealer, powder, etc. Some dance moms also recommend eye makeup primer cream and makeup set spray to help everything stay in place.

Remember that for eye makeup the shadow goes on first, then eye liner, then mascara. :)

For lipstick, it helps to “exfoliate” lips first gently with chapstick and a washcloth, then apply a thin layer of chapstick (or a lip primer), then liner, then the liquid lipstick. Kiss lips together gently once and be careful while it dries over the next minute. Check to make sure none got on the teeth!

Some of our favorite makeup removal tools are:

- Neutrogena [makeup removal wipes](#)
- Soft reusable [makeup remover cloth](#)

## Costumes & Clothing

WPAS takes care of ordering costumes. Make sure you've done a costume test run before the first competition and wear/pack all elements of the costume (there's a full packing list further down in this guide). Note that tights/dance costumes generally get worn with no underwear!

After each competition, it's a good idea to do a check of your costume including tights to make sure everything is ready to go for next time. If your dancer's routine involves props

make sure to bring any materials you might need to repair those on the fly (we could tell some stories about our girls' styrofoam lollipops!).

Make sure also to bring your dancer's WPAS competition jacket. For the awards ceremony, dancers wear their jackets. Other than the jacket, check with WPAS about what your dancer's award ceremony outfit should be — for mini comp in 2023 our girls wore black leggings with a WPAS studio t-shirt of their choice (in addition to their jackets).

## Basic anatomy of a competition season

Regional competitions are in the spring (approximately March-May) and Nationals are in the summer. The studio decides which competitions we compete at and lets parents know the dates and locations. As an example, in 2023 we competed in 3 regional competitions in late March through late April, and Nationals in July.

### Regionals

Regionals generally span a weekend (often Friday evening through Sunday evening) but your child only needs to be there for their specific assigned session(s) [plural if they're competing in more than one dance]. As suggested by the name, Regionals are "local-ish," which depending on the competition could mean someplace in Westchester or New Jersey or Long Island.

Importantly (and sadly!), usually the studio does not know the exact competition schedule until about a week in advance. So while you'll know the location and overall weekend dates at least a few months in advance, it's a bit of a waiting game to know the exact day and time within the weekend. Practically speaking, this means making sure you and your dancer are going to be available for whichever session you might be assigned. Parents (and the studio) don't have control over this. We have noticed that usually Friday evening sessions are reserved for older kids (and Saturday and Sunday sessions are mixed). The first dancers on Saturdays and Sundays may start as early as 7am, with the last dancers at 10pm or even later (awards could go until after 11pm though we haven't seen the youngest dancers assigned to these super late sessions). Each of the full weekend days usually has two award sessions, one around midday (for dancers/groups who performed the first part of the day) and one late at night (for dancers performing the second part of the day); the youngest kids (mini comp) in our experience have been in the first session of the day for competitions.

### Nationals

Nationals are over the summer and in the past have spanned several \*weekdays\* in July, in Atlantic City NJ. This could change in the future depending on which Nationals competition WPAS chooses to compete in but we thought it worth mentioning that weekdays seem to be fair game in case you might need to coordinate requests off for work, summer camp



plans, etc. Though your dancer will only compete in their assigned session(s), there are some (optional) dance workshops held by the competition company and team bonding type activities, and the final awards/closing ceremony the last day (which might be a different day than your dancer performs) that historically has included a showcase performance that the dancers can be in (with accompanying mandatory rehearsals)... so you might want to consider planning a week or a few days away for Nationals. The sessions (e.g., dates and estimated times for each routine) aren't provided until a week or two before Nationals.

## Qualifying for Nationals

To qualify for Nationals, dancers need to compete in one of the Regional competitions held by the same company as the intended Nationals. This brings up one fundamental aspect of dance competitions: they are run by different companies, all of which have their own flavor and their own regional and national competitions. For example, in 2023 WPAS competed at regional competitions held by the companies True Talent, Dance Explosion, and That's Entertainment. The Nationals WPAS selected was That's Entertainment, so the only regional competition that "counted" for qualifying for Nationals was the one held by That's Entertainment. By the way, in reality, "Nationals" isn't truly "National" per se — it just has a somewhat larger catchment area than regionals (e.g., mid-Atlantic)...so you probably don't need to worry about having to fly someplace far away for them! Unless the studio participates in something such as Disney Dance the World, etc.

Technically, to qualify for Nationals the dancers need to get above a certain score at the regional competition...but that score is not very high (below what nearly all routines tend to score) so in reality it seems pretty much that competing at the appropriate regionals will mean qualifying for Nationals. Maybe don't book a totally non-refundable hotel room...just to ward off bad luck!

## What to expect on competition days?

Competition days are long and tiring, but lots of fun! There are tons of dancers at every session and things tend to be pretty loud and high energy! These days are definitely high-intensity for dance moms / dance parents too — don't expect to be able to multitask and, if it's possible, you'll find it easier to leave any other non-dance kids with another family member or babysitter. But also...don't stress...we are all in this together! Ask for help if you need it!

## Competition day schedule step-by-step

As described above, your dancer's routine(s) will be assigned to a specific session and estimated time slot. Importantly, while the order of the routines is generally set for the session, the \*exact\* timing may vary a bit depending on how long prior routines are running, any delays, etc. WPAS will specify what time each dancer/team should arrive at the competition venue. This is usually 60-90 minutes before their number is due to compete, to allow time for preparation, last minute practice, and a buffer against the unexpected.

Dancers are expected to arrive in full costume and makeup. Having learned from experience, we definitely recommend giving yourself lots of extra time to get the makeup right before arriving, find parking, and generally not feel frazzled!

The first stop on arriving at the competition venue is the studio's assigned dressing room (text a teacher or another mom to get the details). This is usually a gym or cafeteria that's completely filled with dancers, parents, and teachers. Space is usually tight — lots of people and not much room to maneuver. Dressing rooms are single sex (so no dads can come in with girls, for example). There aren't generally easily accessible private places to change, so if your dancer is shy about it (at the very least they'll have to change from their costumes into their award ceremony outfit) you may want to bring a long coverup with a zipper ([like this](#)) they can change under or a pop up [changing tent](#). If your dancer has multiple routines/costume changes you might want to bring a portable garment rack.

After the whole team has arrived, their teacher will run the number / practice with them in a hallway or tucked away corner. The dance moms generally stick around until the teacher takes the dancers backstage to be ready a few numbers before their routine — this is your time to take a seat in the audience. Ask your dancer's teacher what "number" they are — this will help you know when their turn is coming up when you're in the audience (and is also helpful for awards — see below).

After your dancers do their routine you'll meet up with them again (depending on age and number of routines) to prepare them for the award ceremony (and give them a big hug of course!).

Each competition session (e.g., Saturday session 1) has its own award ceremony. WPAS will let you know the time of your dancer's award ceremony in advance. All dancers are expected to remain for the award ceremony. The award ceremonies are pretty long — like an hour at least! After the award ceremony everyone takes some quick pictures on stage and then you can head home (unless your dancer is in the next session too!).

## Waiting

There is a decent amount of waiting around at dance competitions — before and between numbers, and waiting for the session awards ceremony. In addition to snacks, you may want to bring some small / portable activities for your dancer(s) like coloring pages or stickers. Just remember to avoid anything that could snag costumes or make a mess (e.g.,

bring crayons rather than markers or colored pencils). It's also fun and educational (if time permits) to go with your dancer(s) into the audience to watch some of the other routines. For yourself, don't forget to bring your phone charger!

## Other Logistics

Parking can sometimes be tricky. It's a good idea to scope out the parking situation in advance (Google maps satellite view is good for this).

Generally, there's no food (or coffee, gasp!) sold onsite at the competitions so bring anything you and your dancer may need to eat and drink. Depending on timing you may want to pack a full lunch or dinner in addition to water and snacks. Some people also order food delivery to the venue or step out for something to eat if there's time between their performance and the scheduled award ceremony.

There are, however, always branded t-shirts, shorts, stuffed animals, etc. for sale. Did we mention dance comps are big business (\$)?:) Relatedly, there are fees for each competition entry, including for group numbers (which are charged per child — exact amount varies but we are talking roughly \$50 per child for a group number, more for solos). WPAS takes care of paying all the fees to the competition companies and then will charge parents the appropriate amount.

Family or friends are allowed to watch the competition routines and award ceremony from the audience. There are no tickets needed. You should count on being very busy with your dancer (prepping them, etc.) so it's not recommended to bring other children along unless someone else is also there to watch them. If other kids are coming to watch you might want to bring along some headphones for them to muffle the sound a bit and protect little ears!

Following the studio Instagram ([westchester\\_performing\\_arts](#)) is fun — they live-post about the competition days.

## Are photos & videos allowed?

Nope — no photos or videos are generally allowed to be taken in the auditorium (you can of course take them elsewhere in the venue). Technically speaking, some competition companies say your child / team could be penalized if you take photos or videos. Some of the competition companies take professional photos and videos and share those. We have seen audience members chastised/warned (by competition company employees) for taking videos during the dances...it seems like during the awards ceremonies the policy is relaxed a bit and more folks seem to take photos or videos then.



## Competition day packing list

Here's a starter packing list for competition days. Even though your dancer will be arriving in full makeup, etc. you'll definitely want to bring everything with you for touch ups!

- Costumes (including any hair pieces and tights) [obviously if they have just one costume they'll come wearing this]
- Any props for costume and any items needed to repair or replace props on the fly
- Dance shoes
- WPAS studio jacket
- Award ceremony outfit (see section above - remember to pack underwear, socks, and street shoes)
- Makeup - bring everything!
- Hair supplies - hairspray, gel, brush, comb, Bobby pins, hair ties
- Any good luck charms or stuffed animals your dancer / team might have
- Makeup remover wipes
- Baby wipes and hand sanitizer
- Coverup (for dancer to change under)
- Small first aid kit (or make sure at least one person in your group has)
- Small sewing kit (or make sure at least one person in your group has) including small pair of scissors
- Clear nail polish (for tight runs, though WPAS has emergency backups and it's also a good idea to carry your own) & super glue (you never know!)
- Water bottles (with straw for your dancer)
- Snacks / meal
- Activities for kids (see "waiting" above)
- Don't forget your wallet, keys, & phone with phone charger. :)

As a team you might also want to coordinate bringing a pop-up changing tent, portable garment rack, and mirrors (it's easy enough to live without these at competition though, especially for the younger dancers). For dancers in many numbers some people invest in special rolling dance suitcases that have a built-in garment rack.

## Scoring / Awards

Dance competition scoring / awards is, in a word, nuts. Each competition company has a few peculiarities about how they do awards. Their websites generally have helpful, detailed information about how scoring and awards work. Here we give just a very quick general primer that might help you understand what the heck is going on during the award ceremony. But remember...it's not really about the scores and awards! And the good news, especially for the littlest dancers, is that the scoring and awards process is so complex that mainly they just think they won big no matter what! ;)

All the dancers sit up on the stage with the other dancers from their studio during awards, which can last up to an hour (or even a bit more) at regionals and several hours for the final nationals awards ceremony!

### Adjudicated scores

All routines receive a score. Generally there are 3 judges that give scores out of 100, resulting in a total score out of 300. The numeric score determines the adjudicated score category awarded to each routine. The categories vary a bit for each competition company but are generally along the lines of silver, gold, high gold, platinum, and high platinum (listed from lowest to highest category — sometimes with an extra gold category like solid gold thrown in before platinum). So, for example, at That's Entertainment, all routines with total scores 271-280.9 are categorized as "high gold." During the awards ceremony they will announce every routine's score category.

The judges also provide real-time critiques during each routine — you don't hear these live but they are recorded and shared with the studio (and then the studio plays for the dancers) sometime after the competition.

### Special Judge's Awards

Each of the three judges gets to give out a handful of "special judge's awards" for various things that strike their fancy. These are generally given out at the beginning of the award ceremony, with each judge describing and giving out their awards. In addition to the Special Judge's Awards, each competition company has a few other special awards unique to their competitions, like awards for overall choreography or entertainer of the year nominations.

### Rankings

Routines are also assigned the more familiar 1st place, 2nd place, 3rd place, etc. rankings based on their numeric score compared with the scores for other routines in their categories.

To understand rank scoring it's important to know about the different divisions and categories in a dance competition. First, there are age divisions (e.g., "mini" for 6 & under, a 7-9 age division, 10-12, etc.). There are also "levels" for each routine based on the experience level of the dancer / studio. Usually WPAS dance teams compete at the novice level, which is sometimes named different things at the different competitions but generally is for more beginner dancers or dancers that practice less than 3-4 hours per week. There are also intermediate and advanced levels (again sometimes named different things depending on the competition company) for more pre-professional dancers. Then, of course, there are different categories for each style of dance (e.g., tap, lyrical, jazz). Finally, there are categories depending on the number of dancers in a routine (solo, duo / trio, small group, large group).

Generally there are ranked awards given at the most narrow level and then a broader level. For example, within "novice, 7-9, small group tap" there will be a 1st place (and 2nd, 3rd, etc.) assigned within that specific combination. It's not uncommon that there will be only 1

routine in a given session in each of those narrow groups; some competition companies will automatically give that routine 1st place and others require the group achieve above a certain score category to be awarded a 1st place. These narrow division/category ranked awards are usually announced at the same time as the adjudicated score category. So, for example, your dancer's routine might get awarded something like: "Mini small group tap, Number 123, [Routine Name], solid gold and first place."

In addition to the ranked awards in the very narrow/specific categories, there are also overall awards for each age division and level for group routines and solo/duo/trio (but combining all the styles of dance). So, for example, there might be overall rankings for all group routines in the novice 7-9 age group. Depending on how many are in each grouping they may go out to 5th or 10th place. These "overall" awards are obviously harder to win and a big deal.

Again, each competition is somewhat peculiar so this is just a general sense of how things work. You can find details, if you're interested, on the competition company websites.

### Accepting awards

For the ranked awards, a member of the team accepts the award on behalf of the team (the teachers will decide who will do this in advance). Make sure your dancer is ready to answer an enthusiastic "Westchester Performing Arts Studio!!!" when the judge or emcee asks what studio they're from. All the trophies and certificates are kept by WPAS for group routines. Sometimes dancers competing may get a pin, which can say the adjudicated rank (e.g., solid gold) or ranked place for their routine. The dancers collect these pins on their WPAS jackets.

## A Final Note

As we remind our dancers, the most important thing is to have fun! It's a lot of work but it's worth it. Make some memories and enjoy this special time with your child! ❤️