Costume & Fitting Season Guide for Dance Studios

Simple ways to run costume season without the chaos, for your studio and families

Why We Made This Guide

Costume season is when a studio's calm, organized fall can turn into a flood of texts about sizes, deadlines, and who owes what.

Most of it comes down to a handful of questions parents ask again and again: When are fittings? What size is my dancer? How much is this going to cost? What are we supposed to buy on our own?

Whether you order costumes for every class or only for your competitive teams, a few small habits in the fall can keep the questions manageable and the families on your side. This guide covers simple ways to run costume and fitting season without the chaos.

1. Give Families One Costume Timeline

Parents don't mind deadlines. They mind finding out about them in three different places.

Before the first measurement is taken, put every costume date into one document or email that you point back to all season. This becomes the place families check first.

A useful timeline includes:
• the date measurements are due
• the fitting window or fitting day
• the last day to make size changes
• payment due dates
• the expected delivery date, and when you'll let families know if it slips
• the first day dancers wear costumes in class

Send it once, repost it when a date changes, and link to it in every costume-related message. When a parent asks "when is the deadline?", the answer is a link.

2. Take Measurements That Hold Up

Wrong sizes are the most common source of costume stress, and most of them start with a measurement that was rushed or guessed.

A few things help:
• measure every dancer yourself, or have one trained person do it, rather than asking parents to send numbers from home
• record measurements in one shared sheet so the same numbers are used for every order
• tell families upfront that dancers grow, and that a September measurement may not fit in March
• decide ahead of time how you handle a dancer who is between sizes

If a vendor's size chart differs from what you've used in the past, check it before you order. A quick test fitting with a sample size can save you a round of exchanges.

When families know how sizing decisions are made, they're far less likely to question them.

3. Plan the Fitting Day Like an Event

A fitting day with no plan usually means long lines in the lobby, half-dressed kids in the hallway, and a lot of repeated explanations.

A little structure goes a long way:
• schedule fittings by class or time slot instead of an open window
• tell families how long each slot takes and whether a parent needs to stay
• set up a private space for changing, and let parents know where it is
• keep a checklist for each dancer so nothing gets missed: costume, headpiece, accessories, and any notes
• assign one person to record fit issues as they come up

Before the day, remind families what to bring, such as the tights and undergarments the costume will be worn with. Fit depends on them, and it's much easier to judge a costume the way it will actually be worn.

After the day, follow up in writing with anything that needs a change, so no one has to rely on memory.

4. Be Clear About Costs Before Anyone Is Surprised

Money questions get awkward fast when families feel they weren't told something. Most of that can be prevented with one clear message before orders go in.

Spell out:
• the cost of each costume, by class
• what the price includes, and what it doesn't (headpieces, accessories, alterations, shipping)
• when payment is due and how to pay
• what happens with a late payment
• your policy on refunds or exchanges after an order is placed

If you offer a payment plan, put the dates in the timeline from section 1 so families can plan around them.

It also helps to say in the message that you've kept costs as reasonable as you can. Families tend to respond well when they can see the thinking behind the number.

5. Cover Alterations, Accessories, and Care

The costume itself is rarely the problem. It's the tights, shoes, hair, and small details that families didn't know they were responsible for.

Give parents a short list for each costume that answers:
• what the studio provides and what families buy on their own
• which tights, shoes, and undergarments to use, with a brand or color if it matters
• hair and makeup expectations
• who handles alterations, and who pays for them
• how to store and care for the costume between rehearsals

A simple rule such as "costumes stay at the studio until dress rehearsal" can prevent lost pieces and last-minute repairs. If costumes go home, tell families how to hang and clean them, and remind them a few days before each performance.

6. Set Expectations Around Costume Photos and Sharing

Costumes tend to show up online the moment they arrive, sometimes before you've announced them. A short policy keeps things consistent.

Consider deciding and sharing:
• whether families may post costume photos before the performance, or should wait for a reveal
• whether costumes are photographed at the studio, and by whom
• how you want the studio tagged when families do post
• any privacy preferences for dancers whose photos shouldn't be shared

The details matter less than saying them early. Families are glad to follow a rule they heard about in September, and less glad to learn it after posting.

7. Closing Thoughts

Costume season is mostly a communication job. The sewing and shipping are out of your hands once orders are placed, but what families know, and when they know it, is entirely up to you.

One timeline, careful measurements, an organized fitting day, upfront pricing, and a short list of what families are responsible for will cover most of what causes stress.

Set those up now, and the rest of the season gets easier to run.