

## How should pointe shoes fit?

Pointe shoes must fit snugly. Loose shoes greatly decrease a dancer's control of movement and increase her chances of injury. So, it is impossible to buy pointe shoes "to grow into." This snugness may feel surprising at first, but your daughter's fitter will ask many questions to determine whether the shoes are too tight or just snug in an unfamiliar way. They should never be tight enough to cause pain. Signs of overly tight shoes include pinching of the little toes, toes not lying flat, squeezing or creasing of the sole of the foot, and a feeling that the big toe is jammed or stubbed.

In a properly fitting shoe, the **toe box** sits smoothly against the toes. All five toes lie flat against the **insole**, and the big toe reaches the end of the box comfortably when the dancer does a plié. The heel is snug when the dancer stands on flat; on pointe, there is a little "pinch" in the heel fabric. On pointe, the dancer's weight is evenly distributed on her toes, she is balanced on the center of the **platform**, and the feet do not sink into the box. The foot follows the line of the leg all the way to the toes, with no noticeable angle at the **metatarsal area** or ankle. The entire body is held in correct alignment, so that an imaginary vertical line could be drawn from the head to the toes.

*metatarsal area* The metatarsals are five long bones connecting the heel and toes. "Metatarsal area" refers to the joints between the metatarsals and the toes, where the toes bend at the ball of the foot.

## How do pointe shoes support the body?

Two parts of the shoe work together to support the entire weight of the body on the platform of the shoe: the toe box and the **shank**. The box, firm yet malleable, holds the toes together and keeps them straight. The shank is a stiffened part of the sole, usually a layer or several layers of material between the insole and the **outer sole**, which supports the entire foot on pointe. Shanks are made in different degrees of strength, or stiffness, so that each dancer can choose the amount of support she needs. The dancer should never rely on an overly stiff shank. Instead, she must develop so much strength that the shoe is a partner, not a prop. Choosing the correct shank strength facilitates this development.