



## Summer Dance Camp Experience – Today, I Want to Vent!

Kim Well Qualls, Parent

While in California, we encountered a summer dance camp opportunity. The San Francisco Parks and Recreation department was offering a 10-day Summer Dance Camp at Harvey Milk Rec Center for beginners and experienced dancers, ages 11 - 19. It was advertised as a camp that will explore various dance genres and end with a performance. We decided to take the opportunity to join the summer camp. What could go wrong?

I walked into the lobby to find the teacher and to introduce myself to her and listen to camp orientation. I have a hand written note that tells the teacher some things about my Brie's strengths, challenges and helpful ideas. The teacher takes the note without glancing at it and tells me that we need to talk. I ask her whether my daughter should join us and she says no, so I ask my daughter to wait in the lobby with other campers who are arriving. I follow the teacher to a conference room.

The teacher begins the conversation by saying that she received an email about Brie from the Parks and Rec inclusion supervisor that describes Brie. She wants to know what kind of loud noises bother Brie, as I stated on her inclusion form that she's sensitive to loud noises. I mention, as an example of loud noises, explosions. The teacher stares at me blankly then says that they wear tap shoes in the class and asks me whether the sound of constant taps will upset Brie. I answer no and again I state the example of a loud noise as an explosion. Again, the teacher's blank stare is what I observe.

I don't understand her stare. So, I restate the word explosion and give her the example of a bomb exploding near to you as the kind of loud noise that would upset Brie. I'm not kidding; she just stares and then says, "Well, we play really loud music." At which point, I conclude that she cannot picture the difference between loud music and the sound of a bomb exploding nearby. So, I let the effort pass and I acknowledge that the loud music will not upset Brie.

Next, the teacher explains that the dance camp is an intensive one, which means that they never stop moving. The teacher suggests that I didn't understand the rigor involved when I registered for camp. "Do you think your daughter can handle this rigor," she asks me and I respond, "yes."

She next points to the schedule she's providing to me. She highlights the names of the various instructors and mentions their achievements and how notable they are in performing arts circles. I don't recognize their names so now I am staring at her blankly. My turn, I guess, to be clueless! She says that the stature of the instructors denotes the master nature of this camp. She continues that the camp is an opportunity for campers to understand more about the Parks and Rec competitive troupe that is selected in the fall.

## Texas Parent to Parent

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Lastly, she talks about the dance performance that will happen next Friday, the last day of this 10-day camp. She stresses how the campers will need to be ready. I nod, no problem. She concludes with, let's see how today goes and then check-in. She asks whether I have any questions. I have a number of questions for the teacher. My last one is, "Where's your supervisor?"

Why am I writing about this experience, you may ask yourself? The answer is because I'm so very tired of the unkind, intolerant way that so many people react when you disclose to them that your loved one is differently abled and that you want him or her to participate. I'm so sad that people are so ignorant about disabilities. Unless you have a loved one with social learning challenges, you may not recognize the harmful, offensive, cruel and discriminatory way that this teacher behaved.

She did not welcome Brie to the class. She did not express how she was looking forward to Brie enjoying the weeks and wonder how she may contribute to Brie's positive experience. Rather, her demeanor and questions were intended to dissuade me from leaving Brie. She did not ask about Brie's long background and experience in dance. She did not ask about Brie's favorite dance genres. She didn't ask me anything about Brie that would have informed her on how to support Brie. Rather, her only concern was whether Brie would slow down her class and wreck the final performance.

I usually would recommend more training for this dance teacher and her team. But today, I don't feel like making room for this teacher's discrimination. Today, I want to scream and ask you all what is wrong with the world! Why don't people practice loving thy neighbor? I want to know why people are so hateful, scared and stupid. Today, I want to vent!!!!

Then, I will move on, especially as I glance at Brie through the glass windows of the dance studio and observe her beautiful smile and watch her dancing.

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