



## **PARENT** and STUDENT HANDBOOK

*For the 2018 – 2019 school year*

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# M.J.P. Academy of Irish Dance

## Handbook Acknowledgment Form



**\*\*Participation in class is not permitted until this form has been signed and returned. \*\***

Should you require additional information or clarification regarding these or any policies listed in the handbook, please speak to an MJP instructor or email [mjpacademy@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacademy@hotmail.com). MJP Academy of Irish Dance reserves the right to make changes to the handbook and policies contained within it as it sees fit.

INITIAL

I confirm that I have read and understand the policies and information contained within the MJP Academy of Irish Dance Parent & Student Handbook.

INITIAL

### EMAIL COMMUNICATION

I confirm that I have supplied a current and valid email address to the dance school for purposes of communication related to my and/or my child's enrollment in the dance school. I further confirm that this email is checked regularly. I understand that email is the primary method of communication to parents and dancers about important events during the year.

INITIAL

### PAYMENT OF FEES

I understand that the first and last month (June) fees are non-refundable and that NSF cheques will be subject to a \$25 fee. I further understand that I must provide written notice prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month. If I wish to withdraw and do not give written notice, my account will continue to be charged until receipt of my formal written notice.

If payment has not been received by the first of the month, dancers will not be permitted to participate in class, competition or performances until payment has been received. Late accounts are subject to the surcharges as listed in the 'Fees and Payment Policy' contained within the handbook.

INITIAL

### SHOWS & PERFORMANCES

Cancelling your commitment to dance in a show or performance may affect your invitation to participate in future shows. Any dancer who arrives at a show after the others have finished the rehearsal will not be permitted to dance in the show. There are no exceptions.

INITIAL

### SOLO DRESSES

If you intend to purchase a solo dress, it **MUST** be preapproved by Joelle Sheppard to ensure it is up to date, the correct length, and suited to the dancer's style and level of dancing/competition.

### 2018/2019 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Dancers Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Parent or Guardian (if under 18)

\_\_\_\_\_

Date

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YYYY MM DD

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## WELCOME

On behalf of our staff and parent committee, it is my pleasure to welcome you to MJP Academy of Irish Dance. We are all looking forward to meeting and working with you.

This handbook has been created for new comers to MJP. However, it contains important policies that all returning parents and dancers are expected to become familiar with each year. If you have additional questions that have not been addressed here, please contact me, the parent committee or your dance class instructor.

Our website contains a tremendous number of resources and is updated frequently. Please visit us at <http://www.mjpacademy.com>

Sincerely,

Miss. Joelle  
(Joelle Sheppard, B.G.S., M.A., T.C.R.G., A.D.C.R.G.)  
Creative Director & Head Instructor  
E-mail: [mjpacademy@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacademy@hotmail.com) phone: 403.271.0696

President of MJPIDA Parent Committee E-mail: [mjpida@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpida@hotmail.com)  
&

The MJP Instructors: Anya Johnston, Emily Blessing, Marissa Braden, and Natalie Duncan



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## MJP PHILOSOPHY

MJP Academy of Irish Dance wishes to provide each dancer with the opportunity to reach his or her full potential by teaching important development skills such as physical fitness, coordination, and teamwork. Students of MJP Academy have the opportunity to compete in local and regional competitions as well as to perform in numerous shows throughout the year. We believe this will enable students to form a healthy and competitive outlook as well as an understanding of the art of stage presence. MJP Academy encourages all of its dancers and members to demonstrate dedication, hard work, and a positive attitude.

## INSTRUCTOR BIOS

**Joelle Sheppard** (*Miss. Joelle*) B.G.S., M.A., T.C.R.G., A.D.C.R.G.

### **Creative Director & Head Instructor**



Joelle started MJP Academy of Irish Dance in February of 2007. Three short years later, the school grew to include over 100 students by 2010. Joelle started dancing at the age of 5 in Calgary and continued to dance and compete until the age of 22.

During her dance career, Joelle achieved open status and attended many local and international competitions including Nationals, Worlds, and Oireachtasí in both Western Canada and Ireland. She holds a Master of Arts Degree in Irish Dance Performance from the University of Limerick, Ireland as well as her T.C.R.G. certification. This certification in addition to registration with the Irish Dancing Commission (An Coimisiun le Rinci Gaelacha - CLRG) grants the students of MJP eligibility to register and compete in local, regional, national, and international Irish dance competitions.

In 2017, Joelle passed her A.D.C.R.G. exam and she is now an accredited adjudicator with CLRG, allowing her to judge at CLRG Irish dance competitions.

**Natalie Duncan** (*Miss. Natalie*)



At the age of 5 years old, Natalie began Irish Dancing. Continuing the trend many of her family enjoyed before her, she loved the rhythm, music, and the tradition of Irish dance and culture. As Natalie's heritage is Irish, she felt naturally at home and immense joy while dancing. During her dance career as a child, Natalie made new friends within the Irish dance community that stayed with her for life.

As Natalie completed school, she took a break from traditional and competitive Irish Dance, focusing on recreational Irish Dance over the next ten years. During this time, Natalie taught Irish dancing at a number of noncompetitive dance studios throughout Calgary, choreographing multiple dance pieces for the studio's year end shows.

In 2016, Natalie re-joined the world of competitive Irish dance to assist Joelle in teaching at MJP Academy of Irish Dance and plans to attain her T.C.R.G (Irish dance teacher's certification) in the near future.

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## Marissa Braden *(Miss. Marissa)*



Marissa was introduced to the world of dance at the age of 6 when she started Jazz and Tap classes but she didn't find her true passion until she joined Irish dance two years later.

After a year of recreational Irish dancing, Marissa began competing and never looked back. Her rise to Championships took only two short years due to endless hours of hard work and dedication. Marissa has qualified for and will be attending the North American Championships in Orlando, Fl. in July, 2018.

Soon after she started competing, Marissa began student teaching at MJP in 2010 and took on her first classes as a teacher in our studio in September of 2013.

Marissa is as dedicated to her students as she is to her dancing and any students that have her as a teacher adore her and can't wait until their next class with her.

## Emily Blessing *(Miss. Emily)*



Emily is a very precise dancer. She has reached the second highest level in competitive dancing and is a strong show dancer with MJP; dancing a leading role in our regular performances.

Emily treats everyone around her with kindness and respect, and the younger students are drawn to her and her classes because of this. She has a strong work ethic and she inspires her students to reach the same level of discipline in their own dancing.

She enjoys working with children and strives to make class both fun and challenging. Her students can see that she is passionate about her dancing which makes her a wonderful role model and positive influence to every dancer she encounters in the studio.

## Anya Johnston *(Miss. Anya)*



Anya started dancing Tap and Ballet at the age of 3. Four years later, she began Irish dancing recreationally. At the age of 14, Anya fell in love with the competitive world of Irish dance and joined MJP Academy. Since that time, Anya progressed through the beginner grades in competition into the Championship level in just three years, reaching the highest level in competition (Open Championships) in April, 2018. Anya has participated in 3 Western Canadian World Qualifiers and will be attending the North American Championships in Orlando, Fl. in July, 2018.

Anya began teaching her first class at MJP in the fall of 2017 with our South Tiny Toes class. She loves to help others and has stated that her favorite things about being at MJP are; teaching her own students, and mentoring some of the older dancers at MJP.

A very talented and hardworking dancer, Anya inspires her students to work hard and reach their goals. She loves to see her students progress and grow into strong dancers.

She is a kind and loving person and is looking forward to teaching all our South beginner classes next year.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION & LOCATIONS

MJP Academy of Irish Dance  
Miss. Joelle (403) 271-0696

[mjpacademy@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacademy@hotmail.com)

Parent Committee

[mjpida@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpida@hotmail.com)

New Parent Liaison

[mjpnewparent@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpnewparent@hotmail.com)

Costume Coordinator

[mjpdress@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpdress@hotmail.com)

Feis Coordinator

[mjpfais@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpfais@hotmail.com)

Used Shoe/Dress Exchange

[mjpshoes@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpshoes@hotmail.com)

MJP Accounting

[mjpacctsreceivable@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacctsreceivable@hotmail.com)

MJP Volunteer Coordinator

[mjpvolunteers@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpvolunteers@hotmail.com)

MJP fundraising volunteer

[mjpidafundraising@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpidafundraising@hotmail.com)

Monday & Thursday Classes (SOUTH)

MidSun Community Centre  
50 Midpark Rise SE, Calgary, AB

Tuesday Classes (NORTH)

Highwood Community Centre  
16 Harlow Avenue NW, Calgary, AB

Wednesday Classes (NORTH)

Highland Park Community Centre  
3716 2nd Street NW, Calgary, AB

## COMMUNICATION

We have several communication methods to keep you informed throughout the year and to answer frequently asked questions about costumes, shoes, competition and the like. As our Instructors are focused on maximizing their time in class with students they are unavailable to spend time addressing questions during class time. Each family is asked to supply a valid and frequently checked email at the beginning of the year so that we can stay in touch and other important resources are listed below:

- Website - [www.mjpacademy.com](http://www.mjpacademy.com) contains class schedules, competition information and more
- Email- Our number one method of communication is via email. Regular updates are provided from our dance school's email address [mjpacademy@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacademy@hotmail.com) and this email is checked Mon-Thurs, once daily.
- Telephone - (403) 271-0696
- Parent Committee Meetings are held throughout the year and are a great way to have a say and stay up to date with the happenings of our dance school. Everyone is welcome.

While it is our responsibility to ensure we provide accurate, up to date information to you, it is your responsibility to seek assistance with any questions that you have and access and read the provided information.

## IMPORTANT DATES

*\*\*Please refer to the interactive calendar or our "Dates 2018.pdf" on the website at [www.mjpacademy.com](http://www.mjpacademy.com) to ensure you don't miss any important competitions, shows, or meetings.*

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## ATTENDANCE POLICY

It is essential that students attend class regularly to improve their dancing ability and to assume responsibility for their roles in group and show dances, where other dancers are relying on their presence. MJP students are required to maintain an acceptable attendance record to be eligible to participate in shows and performances. If you will miss more than one class in a row, please email [mjpacademy@hotmail.com](mailto:mjpacademy@hotmail.com).

## CLASS LEVELS AND DESCRIPTIONS

Full details of all classes and workshops offered can be found on the MJP website.

### Workshops

Workshops are in addition to weekly classes and are held on select weekends during the year. Dancers will learn new steps, practice performance routines or learn choreography during these sessions. For this reason, some workshops are mandatory while others are optional. Dates and details of each type of workshop are contained in the "Registration Package" and can also be found posted on the calendar of the MJP website.

### Show, Performance, and Figure Classes

These classes are for dancers of any age who are in a minimum of their second year of Irish dance. Dancers enrolled in these classes will learn a special feature dance to be performed in our annual year end show. This dance will be similar to the type of choreography used in professional shows like *Riverdance*, and will help give the dancers the edge they need to audition for these shows. Dancers in these classes will also learn figure dances which are the traditional group dances used by Irish step dancers in competitions and are tested as part of the teacher's Grade Exams.

## DANCER CHECKLIST

If you are in your first year of dance, don't forget to bring your dance shoes and a water bottle to each class. But please, no glass bottles.

If you are in your **second year of dance and up**, please bring:

Skipping Rope

Yoga Mat

Dancer Journal (see below for details)

White socks above the ankle

Please label **all** items that your dancer will be bringing to class so that we can return it if/when it is left behind.

## DANCER JOURNALS

If you are in your second year and up\*, please bring a small notebook (journal) to class with you. Students are expected to bring their dance journals to every dance class with them. Since we often tell students many things throughout one class, students will get the most out of their classes if they write down all of the tips and exercises they receive in class each night.

Students can also use their journals to keep track of what they have been practicing at home and how frequently they have been dancing. If you are a competitive dancer, you can write down any judge's comments you get at each feis as well.

\*1st year dancers are encouraged to use journals. But are not required.

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## ATTENDING SHOWS AND PERFORMANCES

Shows and performances are an exciting way to share the talents in our school. If you commit to attending a performance, it is imperative that you attend and arrive in full costume at least 15 minutes before the scheduled rehearsal time for every show (Rehearsals usually take place 45 minutes prior to the show start time). Most of our performance numbers include group dances that appear chaotic or unprofessional when dancers are forced to improvise at the last minute due to missing members. Not only does this project a poor image of our school, but is also unfair on the dancers who followed through on their commitment to attend.

Dancers arriving late to a scheduled performance, or arriving after the other dancers have finished a rehearsal will not be permitted to dance in the show. Any dancers arriving after the rehearsal of a dance will not be permitted to dance in that particular number at the show. NO EXCEPTIONS. Those who are repeatedly late, or cancel at the last minute may not be asked to participate in future shows.

Please arrive in FULL HAIR AND MAKE UP. Dance dresses and shoes can be put on once you arrive, but please avoid unnecessary delay by having your hair and make-up finished before you leave the house.

## CONDUCT AT THE FEIS & EVENTS

Please remember that all of our behavior at a feis or show (Parents, Teachers and students) is a reflection on our school, especially when dancers are wearing the MJP costume. At MJP, we value sportsmanlike behavior: Please do not speak negatively of any dancers, adjudicators, teachers or other schools. A good thing to remember is that you never know if someone's Mom or teacher is sitting right behind or in front of you. At the same time, please refrain from making negative comments about our own dancers or school when you are at the feis. If you have a valid complaint, please bring it to myself or another teacher so that it can become constructive criticism. On the other hand, speaking positively about MJP is fantastic but just be sure not to put down any other schools in the process.

Dancers attending a feis or a dance performance are expected to be **properly attired**. A sports bra and bloomers are not acceptable for a public event. Although the Irish dance community is a small one, competitions and shows are public events so please be weary of who might be in attendance. Also, being properly dressed helps to represent your school in a professional manner.

Tips for Parents:

While it can certainly be tempting to tell your dancer to go and get first place as a pep talk, please resist. If the competition becomes about something that is beyond your dancer's control, or if they are pressured to achieve something they have no control over (winning first) then your dancer will perform poorly. We cannot control how

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the other dancers will perform or which dancer the judge will like best. The only thing your dancer can control is how they dance. So, if your dancer focuses on dancing the best they can and stays focused on having fun and completing a strong performance, your dancer will perform better and will have a more positive experience.

## CLASS ATTIRE & CONDUCT

Students in all class levels are required to come to class prepared to dance in proper attire consisting of:

- shorts and a t-shirt or tank top, OR
- tights and a body suit (skirt optional), black is recommended so they can be also used for performance
- Long white socks or poodle socks (for 2<sup>nd</sup> year dancers and up)
- Hair pulled back and out of your face
- A proper sports bra for older dancers
- Dance shoes as appropriate (\*\*PLEASE LABEL YOUR SHOES WITH YOUR NAME)

Shorts should be above the knee so that corrections can be made to position and placement. Tights should always be worn underneath shorts that are shorter than 4-5 inches.

***Jeans, long pants or long skirts of any kind are NOT PERMITTED  
as they can get caught on heels of shoes and cause a tripping hazard.***

While in class, student expectations are as follows:

- No eating or chewing gum. Food is not permitted in classes that are 1 hour or shorter, but for longer classes may be eaten during a designated break only.
  - No pop, caffeinated or energy drinks.
  - Please bring a water bottle to class
  - No running.
  - Please start stretching and warming up as soon as you arrive.
  - Show respect to the instructor and your fellow dancers
  - With the exception of designated breaks, students should be working on their dance steps at all times.
  - Cell phones or other electronic devices are not permitted with the exception of an iPod with headphones that has been approved for use by the instructor, i.e. for set dances, etc.)
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## DISCIPLINE POLICY

The goal of MJP Academy Instructors is to make dance class a fun, positive experience that is supportive of individual and group learning. We seriously hope that we won't ever have to enforce this policy. Our expectation is that every dancer will treat others as they would like to be treated.

In a situation where a dancer's behavior or conduct is not appropriate, discipline will be enforced that is appropriate to the age group of the dancer involved. Little ones may be asked to sit down for a short time out, older students will be given a warning and then may be asked to leave the studio for the remainder of the class. If a student continues to be disruptive, for all age groups, parental involvement will be requested.

Disciplinary action is applicable to usage of profanity, verbal or physical altercations, or where continued disregard and disrespect toward an instructor or classmate is evident.

Should any student commit one of these offences during class or any dance related activity the following measures will be taken:

**1st Offence-** Parents notified as soon as possible and the student will be required to provide a verbal apology to the classmate and/or instructor.

**2nd Offence-** Parent notification and 2-week suspension from class and dance activities.

**3rd Offence-** Parent notification and student will be dismissed from the studio.

## AT HOME PRACTICE

MJP Students are encouraged to practice at home as often as possible. Even a few minutes each day can contribute to the noticeable improvement of both new and experienced dancers. Don't forget to use your dance journals. Our website's "member's only" section includes a number of at home practice resources to help your child with this task.

As parents are sometimes unclear of their role in assisting with at home practice, we simply ask that you help your child find the time and space to practice and leave the rest up to them. Please do not try to coach or teach your child as far as steps and technique are concerned, as this can un-train things we have been working with your child to do and can confuse them. As well, coaching your child runs the risk of your dancer equating how they perform with how you feel about them as a person. This will only serve to put more pressure on your child and cause them to perform poorly. Teaching your child to dance is the teacher's job. We are professionals and will do our very best to ensure your child is ready for the next show or feis.

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## PRACTICE MUSIC

Since timing is the most important thing when a dancer is performing, it is important that dancers have Irish dance music at home to practice with. The more time our dancers spend practicing counting and dancing to their music, the better dancers they will become. We have links to some of our favorite artists on the “Members only” page of the MJP website.

## PARENT VIEWING

MJP Academy classes are ‘closed door’ as our younger dancers are easily distracted by onlookers, so we ask that before and after class time, please wait outside of the studio until the instructor opens the door. During late November, we will invite the parents (and other fans!) to watch as we demonstrate some of the dance steps and skills that have been learned so far.

Confirmed dates will be communicated via email and will be on the calendar on the MJP website.

## MJPIDA (MJP IRISH DANCE ASSOCIATION)

MJP Irish Dance Association (MJPIDA) is MJP Academy’s non-profit Society / Parent Group. Membership is open to anyone over the age of majority. Parents/guardians of dancers and/or dancers who have reached age of majority may apply for family membership.

MJPIDA’s membership fee of \$10.00 is mandatory for all families of MJP. MJP Irish Dance Association provides benefits to all MJPIDA members. Also, MJPIDA owns the costumes worn by dancers of MJP and may only rent these costumes to members of MJPIDA.

The goal of MJPIDA is to support and encourage involvement in the fun, social, and energetic activity of Irish Dance. This group also raises funds for dancers of MJP to be used for items such as costumes, competitions, flooring, or whatever the committee sees fit. For more details, Parents are encouraged to become familiar with the MJPIDA Handbook which is available on the website, [www.mjpacademy.com](http://www.mjpacademy.com).

To accomplish this goal, MJPIDA works hard throughout the year to organize and carryout fundraisers and organize the ‘used shoe and dress exchange’ within our school. MJPIDA also organizes the class costume inventory, coordinates show and performances, and administers the school volunteer points program.

Everyone is welcome and invited to attend the various parent meetings that are held throughout the year.

## IRISH DANCE COMPETITION

An Irish Dance competition is called a Feis (pronounced *fesh*) and is a Gaelic term meaning “festival”. In addition to dance competitions, there are often art and Irish music competitions as well.

The Oireachtas (pronounced *oh-rock-tus*) is a competition that qualifies dancers from their region for the World Irish Dance Championship competition each year. In order to attend “worlds”, a dancer must first qualify at the Oireachtas in his or her region.

In order to compete at any competition, a dancer must practice under and be registered through a teacher certified through the Irish Dancing Commission (An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha), holding a T.C.R.G. credential.

It is the choice of a dancer and his/her family whether they wish to compete and is entirely optional. While our classes are designed to prepare dancers for competition, it remains up to them whether they wish to do so. Please refer to the ‘Feis Guide’ located in the ‘Members Only’ section of the MJP website for more information.

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## GRADE EXAMS

As of 2018, dancers will be required to have completed all of their grade exams in order to take their T.C.R.G. (Teaching Certificate of Irish Dance). These exams are offered a few times a year, often in conjunction with a feis. Any dancers can take these exams if they think that they may be interested in writing their teacher exam sometime in the future. Or, these exams are a great way to practice your steps in front of another teacher and get some feedback. For more details on Grade Exams, you can read this document on the CLRG website: <http://www.clrg.ie/documents/Grade%20Syllabus%202015.pdf>

## SHOES

Irish dancers wear two types of shoes: hard-shoes, and soft-shoes.

**Soft shoes (or Ghillies)** For new dancers, black ballet slippers found in most department stores are acceptable; boys can wear black jazz shoes. If you intend to purchase Irish dance soft shoes from a local dance store in the City, please ensure you do not purchase 'Highland Dance' shoes as they differ from what is required.

**Hard-shoes (or heavy-shoes)** have fiberglass tips on the toes and heels that produce the tapping sound that Irish dancers are known for. Beginners and new dancers usually need at least 1 year of experience in soft-shoes before they possess the technique and ankle strength required to progress into hard-shoes. As they can be expensive, please check with your child's instructor to confirm that they are ready for hard shoes before you assume the expense.

Irish dance shoes can be purchased locally from various vendors at a feis or, from Bob Steele at Steele Celtic Dancewear (403) 686-3514. For used shoes, you can check the MJPIDA 'Used Shoe and Dress Exchange' organized by our parent committee.

Please refer to the 'Shoe Guide' located in the 'Members Only' section of the website for further information on purchasing and fitting your first pair of Irish dance shoes.



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## FEEES & PAYMENT POLICIES

Fees for Irish Dance classes at MJP are per dancer and correspond with the number of class hours attended per week. Please see our "Class Fees" document on our website for details.

### WITHDRAWAL POLICY

Hopefully, you will remain with the studio for the full dance year, and then again annually, thereafter. However, should you find it necessary to withdraw, you must notify the studio in writing prior to the 1st day of the month. **Non-attendance is not considered proper notice.** If you do not give written notice, your account will continue to be charged until formal notice has been received.

### REFUND POLICY

First month's fees and last month's (June's fees) are non-refundable. Refunds will not be given for days missed due to absences, holidays, or weather-related closings. Credit may be given in the event of a medical emergency. Situations such as this will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### NON-PAYMENT POLICY

Dancers with outstanding balances will not be allowed into class. This includes failure to provide payment by the first of a given month. Dancers will not be permitted into the classroom until payment has been made for that dancer.

### DELAYED PAYMENT OF FEES

Delayed payments will result in additional charges to your account. Any payment not received on time will be subject to a 10% surcharge. If after an additional two (2) weeks, payment has still not been made, an additional 10% fee will be attached to the new balance. Further delays will be charged at a weekly rate of 5%.

### NSF CHEQUES

\$25.00 will be charged for all NSF cheques. After two NSF cheques, the remaining balance for the year must be paid in cash following the guidelines above.

### CLASS CANCELLATION

Due to low enrollment, a class may need to be cancelled. Dancers from a cancelled class will be combined with another existing class. If a dancer cannot make any other class times, we will attempt to continue to run the class for the remainder of the existing month and fees will be refunded for the remainder of the year from the first day of the following month (excluding June fees).

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