

A PARENT'S AUDITION SURVIVAL GUIDE

Taking the “Drama” out of Auditions for Middle School Students

Auditions are a fun and exciting time! However, whether this is your child’s first audition experience or their 50th, most kids feel some degree of anxiety when auditioning. Every audition or try-out is tough because it asks a person to open himself/herself up to others for evaluation.

As a parent of four, I understand the position you’re in. We do our best to help our kids through the stress or feelings of self-doubt that may arise from their brave choices to participate. We want them to try new things and learn to persevere. But it’s not always easy.

And as we all know, middle school in particular includes the added element of being in the throes of developmental, physical, and hormonal changes, as well as a strong desire for peer acceptance. This is all normal and healthy, but again, not easy. With all of this in mind, I would like to offer some tips and ideas that might ease the process a little bit.

Casting...It’s a puzzle, not a ladder.

One big thing to understand and help your child understand is directors of theatre have to treat casting like putting together a puzzle. Auditions are the time for directors to get an idea of each child’s capabilities and potential. It is then their job to put those students together into a cast that utilizes everyone’s skills in the best way possible. But wait—there are other factors to take into consideration too, like how a trio of characters will look and sound when together. It is likely that the puzzle has many different possible configurations, but it’s important that students trust the directors as they use their wisdom and experience.

Some students and parents think that theatre is like the business world in the way that a person can climb the corporate ladder, like this: “If I had an ensemble role the first year, a featured dancer role the second year, then I should get a lead role the third year.” While this *may* happen, it also may not. Why? Because it’s a puzzle, not a ladder.

Don’t go into it with only one role in mind.

Every time my own children have gone into an audition thinking, “If I don’t get this one part, I will be devastated,” guess what? They were devastated. As a parent, it’s tricky to balance encouraging your child to “dream big” while also maintaining realistic expectations. But if your child tells you they only want ONE role, it’s a red flag.

Try to reframe this mindset before auditions. Students who go into auditions with the expectation of enjoying the experience of being a part of the cast no matter what the role have the easiest time committing to their role when the cast list comes out. They’re also able to give their all during rehearsal process and lean into the growth that can happen in the role they’ve been given.

The parents set the tone.

A parent's attitude, seen in the things they say and the attitude they display before, during, and after the audition process, will greatly influence the child's perspective and attitude. I know this isn't always easy, but they are always watching and taking their cues (no pun intended 😊) from you.

Our audition style: together & encouraging.

We follow the iTheatrics method and use an "open audition style," recommended specifically for middle school age students. The goal is to make auditions less stressful, more fun and natural, with less waiting-around time. You'll hear your child say that we played games and did everything together. We watch how they take direction and participate in the group activities. We sing, dance, and act together as a group, breaking into smaller groups and offering the opportunity to sing alone if they choose to. We keep it positive, reminding them to encourage and applaud each other as we go.

Call Backs are different.

It's good to understand that Call Backs are different from regular auditions. First, know that not everyone will be called back. We only call back the people that we need to see more from or hear something different. If a student is not called back, that does NOT mean that he or she wasn't cast (we don't cut students).

Second, Call Backs aren't going to allow each student to have equal time, the way regular auditions did. There may be periods of waiting to be called in. This simply cannot be helped because we are busy putting the puzzle pieces together; and as you know, puzzles take time to configure and re-configure. Everyone who is called back will be seen again at some point.

FAQs

How can I help my student prepare for auditions?

See the Audition info on our homepage for all the details. Help your son or daughter locate the "Key Links" section on the homepage and click on the song & script excerpts. First, they can practice the song (choose one, or both if they like) WITH the words. They have them sing a few times without the words. It does NOT need to be memorized. They can sing with the sheet music in their hands. The goal here is just to feel familiar with the lyrics, rhythm, and notes.

They can also practice their acting skills by reading and acting through the script excerpts. Offer to read the other characters while your child reads for one character. Compliment them as you see expression and body language! Have fun with it!

And lastly, it is also important that they get a good night's rest the night before, wear or bring comfortable clothes they can move in, pair of gym shoes/jazz shoes, and a water bottle. Nervous kids often have dry throats!

How can we deter the gossip mill?

No doubt you will hear all about auditions and call backs—who did well and who your child (and their friends) think should get what role. To some degree, we can't keep that from happening. However, an excessive amount of this kind of talk can often create an emotional build-up that will set students up for disappointment or hurt feelings.

As students wait for the cast list to come out, we can deter the gossip mill by talking to our kids in advance about it. Some recommendations on what to say when approached by a gossiping student are to say these 3 magic words: "I don't know," followed by "Let's just wait and see." For more ideas on what to say, check out [this article](#). In general, encourage your child to keep the "speculation" talk to a minimum and to be sensitive to others' feelings.

How can I help my child cope after the cast list comes out?

The audition process can seem long and emotionally tiring for everyone involved (directors too). Reactions to the cast list will range from squeals of joy to tears, and all of that is understandable as well as normal.

Even though it may be disappointing, this is also an opportunity! It gives students the opportunity to practice self-control over their reactions, to both comfort and congratulate their peers, but most of all, to accept the outcome of the audition process with grace. You may want to practice what this looks like with your child (i.e. Ask: What will you say when you see so-and-so tomorrow at school?).

There are 3 things I like to share with parents and students every year when the cast list comes out:

1. **"It isn't personal."** It may feel that way, but remember: it's a puzzle, not a ladder.
2. Think of every audition and show as an opportunity. When I used to get a role I didn't expect, I'd tell myself **"It's a privilege and an honor."** This was my mantra no matter how I felt.
3. **"There is always more theatre!"** No one part is the end of anything, and there are LOTS more opportunities to audition in the future. We are all growing and getting better at what we do every day, even as adults.

Remember, parents, this too shall pass! Here are a few ideas to help that happen:

- Talk about it. As with anything, talk about how they might be feeling.
- Pray with them. Remind them that there are always surprises in life, but we can trust that our heavenly Father is guiding our paths.
- Let it go. Sometimes after a good talk, what kids need most is to move on! Think of a happy topic. Bring up something that lifts their spirits. Make them laugh.
- Celebrate the effort of trying. Go out for ice cream, go to a movie, or do something fun to celebrate their effort!

Throughout the whole process of creating an excellent theatre production, we are all working toward the same goal – for students to be happy, fulfilled, and growing in their interests, talents, and character. I may be biased, but I believe musical theatre is one of the BEST places to do that!

Warmly,

Anna Brink

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