

How to help your child with practice

Practice regularly, every day—seven days a week—no matter how many other demands present themselves. Dr. Suzuki said “Only practice on the days you eat.” Frequency of practice is more important than the length of an individual practice session – seven focused ten minute practice sessions across the week are much more productive than one 70 minute session.

Play the artist’s recording of the music being learned. Do this casually, several times a day, without concern for whether the children are listening attentively.

The age of your child will be a major factor in your approach to practice. If your child is a pre-schooler, keep the elements of a game in high priority since learning takes place best when an activity is fun.

Let your child have some say about the schedule for daily practice. Make a chart showing the times that you have both agreed to and post it as a reminder. Be enthusiastic yourself about practice time!

Find an interesting practice routine that will cover the tasks to be done. List the assignments for the week and decide in what order they will be practiced. This can be done by using a prepared chart, by drawing lottery cards, or by some other system.

Know (ask your teacher) what is reasonable to expect. Children learn at different rates, but excessive demands (or leniency) as a regular diet will create tensions and disinterest.

Actively involve your child in determining specifically what is to be learned and how to go about it. Do not tell him what the teacher said—ask him.

Learn how to work in very small steps—one note, two notes, a measure. Connect one small step to another and rejoice in the progress.

Motivate your child by making a chart which shows her progress. Be creative! Tape your practice sessions. The child hears herself. You hear yourself. You both are sure to get some objective feedback.

Learning the notes, fingering and other technicalities is the beginning of study for a musical piece. Only through mastery will it contribute to the building of permanent skills.

Never begin work on a new piece unless your teacher has suggested or approved it.

Be generous with encouraging remarks, even though a good effort may not have produced successful results. Treat “praise” with caution, avoid verbalizing irritation, and encourage your child with your love and appreciation.

As you advance in the repertoire, spend more and more time reviewing and improving the pieces learned.

Once or twice a week, give a home concert for the parent who does not usually supervise the practice sessions. Include bowing and applause.

Sense when a practice session is over. It is more important to return to the instrument with joy and enthusiasm tomorrow than to force a few extra minutes today.

Many thanks to Diane Begay for contributing these notes.