

## Encouraging Your Child to Practice

Learning a musical instrument is a team effort – the student, teacher and parent are all in this together. You as a parent can trust that, during the lesson, the teacher is addressing the topic of practicing. And during the rest of the week, there are many things you can do to guide and encourage your child to a point of self-motivation.

As there are many ideas herein, they can't all be applied to every child. It is up to you to decide which may be relevant to your child's situation.

1. **Perhaps your help during the practice session is needed.** You can sit in on a lesson to see what exactly is being taught by the teacher. This way you can be of some help at home if it's needed. It could be as simple as asking your child to show you what he/she learned in the lesson.
2. **Perhaps your help during the practice session is a hindrance.** Some children are more productive *without* mum or dad in the room. You could announce that you will be sitting in on the last few minutes of the practice session to hear what is being done – sort of a mini concert. Follow it up with, "sounds great", "keep it up", etc. Positive attention is a great motivator.
3. **Be realistic in your expectations.** A ten-minute session two to three times a week, is fine for a beginner child. As the musical workload increases, so should the practice time and frequency.
4. **The parent's attitude is everything.** Keep it fun and upbeat. "Let's do it!"
5. **Establish a weekly schedule**, i.e. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
6. **Establish a weekday routine** that sees the practice session occurring at the same time each allotted day (i.e. after supper). It's even more effective to *attach* the practice session to something fun (i.e. video games). This way, the child knows that each day after school or after supper, comes music practice *and then* video games.
7. **Is fatigue an issue?** Some kids are at their best in the mornings, before going to school.
8. **Don't expect your child to sit down with the instrument on his own.** It's ok if you have to prompt him every single time – do they brush their teeth each day without a reminder? Mind you, by the second year of musical study, children who are still interested in pursuing music should gradually become more independent about this.
9. **Is the environment conducive to practicing music?** Does your child have an area free from noise and distractions? Is there a music stand?
10. **Is the instrument the child's choice or YOUR choice?** Is your child being forced to learn classical or folk music when he really wants to rock 'n roll? Is he playing piano when he would prefer the guitar?
11. **Is the instrument the right size?** Is it properly set-up?
12. **Make sure you are giving adequate praise for each accomplishment, small or large.** Never make negative remarks about how your child's playing sounds. I've actually heard parents tell their children to "keep practicing because you sound terrible."
13. **Bring your child to see a professional musician perform**, (on the child's instrument of study, where possible). Also, bring your child to see another student perform. The best place for this is at the music school's recitals.
14. **Be empathetic when your child hits a musical plateau or a low spot.** Explain that it happens to all musicians at some time or another. That difficult song WILL eventually become playable and then will actually seem easy.
15. **It's important for you and your child to understand that learning happens in stages.** It is common to find that some passages of music take a long time to master, and others are accomplished right away. The important thing to emphasize is that consistent practice WILL produce results.
16. **Help your child understand that playing only familiar songs will not help him or her improve.**
17. **Basic motivation: keep a calendar (on the kitchen wall) on which a sticker is placed for each practice session.** Come up with a system whereby a prize is awarded after so many stickers, i.e. a small prize for three stickers in one week, as well as a larger prize for 12 stickers in four weeks.
18. **There are movies you can watch with your children or teens to help motivate them.** FYI: not every movie in this list is for all ages...
  - Music of the Heart
  - Mr. Holland's Opus
  - The Sound of Music
  - Josie and the Pussycats
  - The Buddy Holly Story
  - Crossroads (the 1986 version)
  - Eddie and the Cruisers
  - The Karate Kid (not about music, but effectively demonstrates the importance of practicing – ("wax on, wax off")

Music movies to avoid (for now) include: Spinal Tap, Pink Floyd: The Wall, Spice World

**Here is a sample practice session.** The suggested times are indicated first for a beginner or young child, and then in parentheses for an intermediate student.

- Warm-up – 1 (or 3) mins
- A familiar piece, something fun – 2 (or 5) mins
- The current, difficult pieces – 5 (or 15) mins
- Technical requirements, scales, etc. – 1 (or 5) mins
- A final light, fun piece – 1 (or 2) mins

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