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Encouraging Your Student Violinist to Practice

By Leah Megiel

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9:00 am, 11:00 am, 1:00 pm, 3:00 pm, — Practice Time, What's the Big Deal?

If you find yourself immersed in violin tuning, violin fingering charts and perhaps Suzuki music you may find the following helpful.

This short article is the first in a series aimed at shedding some light on this mystery of encouraging your child to enjoy, maybe even look forward to violin practice time.

If you can relate to any of the following statements, please don't tell the rest of us!

1. My child is so motivated to practice her violin, she will go to bed early in order to awake and be ready for practice at 6:00 am.
2. My son quit the soccer team because it was cutting into his violin practice time.
3. I often spend many hours online searching for free violin sheet music just to satisfy my daughter's unquenchable thirst for new music. She loves the challenge!
4. We cancelled our family trip to Hawaii because our son just couldn't bear the fact that he would miss two violin lessons. He's just s-o-o-o motivated and we don't want to break that spirit in him.
5. Violin tuning has become a fun family event, we all love to get involved.
6. My daughter is learning about fractions by memorizing the different violin sizes, 1/16, 1/10, 1/4, who know fractions could be so much fun?!

For the rest (probably 99.99%) of us, let me assure you, there is hope! Chances are, we may never be able to claim any one of the four statements above, but there are positive, fun methods of encouraging your child to practice without pain to them or you.

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Time of day. Three little words that pack a huge punch when it comes to creating an effective practice time. Two things you need to consider are:

1. Your child's age
2. Observe what time of day they have the highest level of concentration.

My daughter began studying the violin at age five. At that time we practiced in the morning, for no particular reason other than it was a convenient time. Occasionally, practice time would get pushed back to the afternoon hours, no big deal or so I thought. Those afternoon practices never went well, but sometimes I don't catch on too quickly. In fact, the somewhat unfavorable afternoon practices were not what clued me in to the fact that my child was not an "afternoon person." It was her writing practice that finally got through to me. Five minutes worth of writing practice in the morning became 20 to 30 minutes of agony in the afternoon. Aha! The light bulb had been turned on, "Maybe," I said to myself,

"just maybe she is a morning person!"

With this fresh information tickling my brain, a commitment was made to keep violin practice time to mornings only. I even went so far as to skip the practice if time ran away from us in the morning. Better to skip it, then to put her through the frustration. As my daughter gets older I've noticed a definite improvement in her ability to maintain a solid concentration level in the afternoon hours.

Now, your child may not be a morning person. Perhaps their energy level is highest in the early afternoon hours or early evening hours. What is important is that you are aware of the time of day their concentration level is best. For younger children this time is usually in the morning, but that is not always true. Not sure when they are at their best? Well, just observe them reading or writing or doing something that requires them to focus. Try different activities at different times of the day. You will definitely notice a difference in their ability to complete the task. The same thing that may take them five minutes to complete when they are at their best, will become a task of frustration when they are at their lowest energy level of the day.

Remember to have fun with your child, after all this business of being involved with your child's music practice is supposed to be a wonderful and precious experience!

Leah is a Mom and proud creator of www.student-violins.com, a site aimed at helping and encouraging parents of violin students.

Violin Study Methods For Beginning Violinists

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What is the best study method for your student violinist?

This article will provide you with information regarding the two most popular methods of violin

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study—the Suzuki study method and the traditional study method. I will share my experience, as a parent — not as a music teacher. My hope is that you will find this information valuable in helping you determine which method of study — Suzuki or traditional— would best fit your needs.

The following is a brief outline of both study methods.

Suzuki violin method overview:

- Suzuki is very much a parental "hands-on" method of violin study. Parents must attend individual lessons so they will be able to help their child with practicing at home. This provides an invaluable tool for the child as well as a great chance for interaction in a fun and exciting journey for parent and child. The advantage of parental involvement cannot be emphasized enough.
- Formal education may start as early as two or three. It is also effective for students of any age.
- Emphasis is in watching and listening. Music is memorized by ear through repeatedly play recordings in the home. Listening to the recordings helps the student to internalize the details of the music such as dynamics, pitch and tone.
- Formal reading of music is not taught until basic skills have been mastered technically.
- In addition to individual lessons, group lessons are required with Suzuki. The purpose of working in a group is to give younger students the opportunity to observe others who are playing at a higher level. This is not a competitive arena and as a parent, you should be observing the group class. This is meant to be a positive and encouraging atmosphere.

Traditional violin method overview:

- Parental involvement usually not encouraged.
- Formal education usually begins between the ages of six and 10. Many traditional violin teachers are unwilling to take on a student younger than six.
- Beginning students do not listen to recordings of the pieces before they start to learn them. This is to develop sight reading skills.
- Individual lessons are all that is required. There are no group lessons and little to no interaction with peers.

Our daughter's teacher is primarily an advocate of the Suzuki method. We have enjoyed the Suzuki method for the following reasons:

1. Parental involvement — we strongly believe this has been a key element in our daughter's success and also her enjoyment of the violin. We are in a position where I am able to commit to the practice times so this has worked out well for us.

2. Group lessons — this has been an encouragement and inspiration for our daughter. Because of group lessons, she has been able to play in trios at the last two Christmas concerts. The older children

are kind and the atmosphere is warm and inviting.

3. Most importantly is the teacher. We have a wonderful teacher who is willing and able to work with our daughter on every level. This past year, the teacher felt our daughter needed to develop her sight reading skills to prepare for the next level of Suzuki. So, we took a break from Suzuki and did traditional for several months. You have got to find a teacher who knows when to challenge your child and also when to step back. I cannot stress this enough, you have to have a good teacher.

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In closing, you are strongly encouraged to do whatever it takes to make this a fun, enjoyable experience for your child. If you start with one teacher and find they are not meeting the needs of your child, then don't wait too long to switch. After all, a poor experience at a young age can turn a child off to music lessons for a long time, possible forever.

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