

PARENT TIPS FOR PRACTICE Quality vs. Quantity

The key to helping with practice is simple: *create an environment that allows the student to gain 'control' of their musical responsibility – the practice session.* No student needs a teacher six days a week. Nor do they need someone pointing out their mistakes, telling them what to practice and when to practice it. So what is the role of the parent?

Goal Setting and Achievement should be the primary objective of practice sessions – not a set time limit. The best questions to ask your student: “What sounds better? What is easier? What did you accomplish?” Do NOT ask “How long did you practice?” Time is arbitrary – a student can spend 30 minutes ‘playing’ their instrument with pieces already learned and/or not focusing on the assignment! The parent can help students learn how to organize the multiple tasks of an assignment into a sequence of learning. Think of this as a weekly ‘long term project’ that allows you to help your student learn organizational skills. Learn to bite your tongue unless asked for help. Your student can hear suggestions from a teacher; however, parental suggestions frequently are heard as criticism. If there is a mistake, the instructor will find it – not to worry!

Mystery Goal Cards. Ask your student to name the different elements that are assigned for practice. Write each one on a 3x5 card and place all of them upside down in a pile or in a bowl. Each practice session a student selects three (or more) different cards from the pile/bowl. Practice each element until it sounds better or is ‘easy’. This helps students to define goals. **Quality not quantity.**

Progress is dependent on meeting new challenges on a weekly basis. Practice involves tackling the new material. Be sure to help your student differentiate between ‘practice’ and ‘play’. Students study music to learn to ‘play’. We want them to ‘play’ for the love of playing. AND, it takes ‘practice’ to ‘play.’

Practice Reminder. Buy a timer. The student is in control of **setting the timer to ring - a friendly reminder to begin a practice session without parental reminding.** *The timer can be used for timing the practice session; however, students are working toward goals, not minutes sitting on the piano bench!* **Quality not quantity.** For every day practiced without parental input, the student gets a point/ticket/sticker at home. xxx number of awards can be redeemed for xxxxx (to be determined by parent and student). Taking responsibility and initiative is a major goal of music study – learning to play the instrument is a side benefit.

TIME MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONAL STUDY SKILLS

After the weekly lesson is the ideal time to sit down with your student and ask them to explain their assignment. This is the time to verbalize weekly goals. It is the perfect opportunity for the younger student to label their assignment with the following words: 1) easy, 2) medium, 3) hard, or 4) review (play). Help your young students deal with ‘hard’ by encouraging them to verbalize that xxx is hard – and their goal is to always include one ‘hard’ piece/section in a practice session. Their weekly goal is to turn ‘hard’ into ‘medium’ or ‘easy’. For younger children, rewrite the assignment on cards as suggested above – all of the ‘hard’ items could be on a certain color of card. AND remember: the student’s perception is always correct – even if the parent thinks the piece/section is easy.

Look at the coming week and plan practice around other activities. Provide a ‘personal’ daytimer that is dedicated to only their activities – instrumental practice is one of their responsibilities along with homework, scouts, sports, dance etc. Have your students record when practice will happen for each week. This gives them a sense of control of their life. They can learn to schedule weeks that are extremely busy with one less day for practice – or schedule a little longer practice session on the other days. Weeks that are not complicated, schedule more time for practice.

Juggling time with busy schedules is a learned skill. Instrumental practice is the perfect opportunity to help your children with time management. Music study demands time. When there is not enough time in any given week for a normal practice routine, encourage your student to identify one (two, three) specific goal(s) to accomplish. It is much easier to find a few minutes of practice time when there is only one goal to accomplish! In this way, the frustration and/or guilt of ‘no practice’ is overcome by accomplishment. Every student can then walk into a lesson – even after a difficult week – and say “I can do THIS better. Listen.” This essential self-motivation keeps students involved in music study. A parents’ main job is to help their students discover this intrinsic quality in spite of a busy schedule.