

# **Piano Parenting**

## ***Practice Journal Chart and Practice Cards***

- 1) Rather than practice on the lesson day, take time with your student to talk about what things are on their piano assignment for the upcoming week. After the piano lesson, students need to verbalize what is 'hard', 'medium' and 'easy' in their new assignment. *Do not tell them what is hard, medium and easy.* Their perception of hard, medium and easy is the key ingredient to giving them control and letting them verbally express their perceptions – the operative word being 'attitude'. If they think something is hard, it's hard. And you're there to support and encourage them in tackling 'hard' without folding up and quitting, getting angry, or dissolving into tears. What kind of incentive /award / recognition will your family provide for accomplishment?

### **PRACTICE JOURNAL CHART**

- 2) Record the evaluation of the assignment in the **Piano Journal Chart**. The student or the parent may write the assignment in the practice journal.

Attaching the label of 'hard' to practice items helps the student cope with frustration. The ability to verbalize frustration helps to remove the emotion from the 'hard' task at hand. Equally important is the learning process of moving from 'hard' to 'easy' in order to prepare for the next 'hard' item that will inevitably follow.
- 3) Identify a 'review' assignment(s) (memory pieces, favorite pieces or material that is performance ready). Record in the Piano Journal Chart under the Review category. Note that this is no longer ***PianoPractice*** but ***PianoPlay***.

It is important for the student to understand that once a piece is learned, it is no longer 'practice'. It has become 'play'. The word 'play' is critical: this is why they are taking piano - to learn to *play the piano*. It is mandatory that the parent help students realize they can *play* and receive joy from the music they create and feel pride in their hard work and accomplishment. The Review PianoPlay material is an excellent way to end a practice session that has been 'frustrating'. Leaving the piano with a sense of accomplishment makes the student want to return the following day. The Review material is also an excellent way to begin a non-motivated practice session.

- 4) The student checks each item on the Practice Journal page when it's practiced.
- 5) Students select from each category when they practice. However, at least one 'hard' item per practice session must be practiced until the piece (or measures) sounds better. The weekly goal is to move the 'hard' items into the 'medium' and 'easy' categories.

### **PRACTICE CARDS**

- 6) Four colors of note cards for the four categories in the Practice Journal: a) Hard, b) Medium, c) Easy, and d) Review.
  - a) Student chooses colors for the four categories.
  - b) Student (or parent) records the items from the weekly assignment on the correct card color (instead of in the Practice Journal). Student and parent discuss the assignment on the lesson day and 'organize' the weekly lesson plan and goals/items to accomplish during the week by writing the items on the cards. Piano practice is a weekly 'long-term project' of multiple items 1) that cannot be accomplished at the last minute and 2) that build on each other. This provides an opportunity for the parent to help the student learn organizational skills and time management. Unlike a homework page, the piano lesson provides multiple tasks to accomplish over a period of time. Students who not have homework from school are at a complete loss as how to do homework much less organize several different elements into a structured practice session. And a parent continually telling them what to do when is a time-bomb ready to explode. How to help your child 'own' their accomplishment without your continual need to 'tell' them what to do?
  - c) How to give the student the 'illusion' of control. Rather than the parent telling the child what to practice, the student makes a game out of choosing practice elements. Each practice session, all cards are placed face down on the floor, or in a bowl, or in the parents hand like a card game. The student must choose one (or two, or three) of

each color as their daily practice or as the 'structured' part of their practice. A tally (check mark, line) is made on the reverse side of the card when completed. The Rule: always must choose a card without a mark each practice session. Keep the repetitions evened out during the course of the week.

- d) The cards give the student tangible proof of accomplishment – the 'hard' red cards become 'medium' yellow cards or 'easy' green cards or 'blue' review cards. This is called success. And with success, the student becomes more willing to work at subsequent difficult tasks - anything they can't immediately do, i.e. a new piece. ***Frustration tolerance*** can be developed. This is a life skill, not just a piano practice technique. Parents – consistently help students "Remember When" xxxx piece was hard – and now it's easy. Sensitive students who have self-esteem issues when they perceive they 'can't do it' can learn how to accept less than immediate perfection as they work toward accomplishing at a higher level – they learn how to accept themselves.