

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC INFORMATION

Practice Tips for Elementary-School Kids

Help your child set up a special place at home to play the instrument.

Establish a time each day to play. Some children are at their best in the morning, before school. Some parents set a time in the evening when the child is relaxed, but not tired.

Consider using the phrase "playing time" rather than "practice time."

If possible, be a positive part of your child's playing time. Sit with your child while he plays and ask, "Show me what you're learning."

Praise your child for each step forward.

Never make negative remarks about how your child's playing sounds. It takes time and effort to produce musical sounds.

Encourage other family members to applaud the child's efforts. Positive attention is a great motivator.

Remember that there are always peaks and valleys in the learning process. You and your child should expect times of discouragement, accept them, and focus on the positive fact that she's learning to make music. Remind her that everything worth doing takes time and effort.

Provide positive role models. Bring your child to hear amateur or professional musicians perform.

Help your child understand that playing only familiar songs will not help her improve.

Explain to your child that learning happens in stages. Sometimes a student will work on something for a long time with no apparent improvement, and then discover a sudden leap in ability. Other times, learning happens very quickly. The important thing to stress is that consistent practice will yield results.

Help your young musician set practice goals. Keeping a journal, not just a practice chart, helps track the peaks and valleys of learning a new piece or improving fundamental skills.

As a parent, don't make judgments about the musical quality of your child's practicing. Learning an instrument requires lots of squeaks, scratches, and wrong notes.

How to Practice - Beginners

Here are some simple guidelines for a 30-minute practice session:

First, warm up with something easy (5-10 minutes)

Next, get down to business while you are fresh - learn something new - REALLY learn it.

Take as much time as necessary.

When you are satisfied that you have achieved your goal for the day, don't stop just yet. Play fun stuff, easy stuff, old stuff, or do some sight reading, for 10 or 15 more minutes.

Here's a game some people use: When learning something new, or fixing a problem, tell yourself that you have to get it right *four times in a row* before you can consider it learned.

Invent exercises.

Always think about your tone when you practice. Even when you are just playing scales, try to play with a good tone.

When you are reading music, ***look ahead***. Don't just look at the notes you are playing - try to see one or two measures at a time.

Spend part of your practice time just making up your own music (improvising).

REMEMBER: LEARNING YOUR INSTRUMENT IS NOT JUST ABOUT THE WEEKLY LESSON. IT IS IMPORTANT TO PLAY A FEW MINUTES EVERY DAY!