

PRACTICE

A parent asked me, “How can I make practicing fun?” That’s a hard question. It’s kind of like asking how to make dieting fun.

It just isn’t. So, then, what about practicing?

1. It is essential for the teacher to leave clear and reasonable instructions for practice.
2. You should set up a regular time and place for your child’s practice.
3. Several shorter practice sessions is as good as one long one.
4. A total of 20 minutes a day is good for starting out.
5. A student should practice directly after and before the lesson.
6. It is good to ask the child to “play for you” or make a recording for a grandparent or other friend, rather than use the “p” word.
7. If it is safe, leave the violin and bow out and ready to go as well as the music on the stand opened to the correct page.

8. Leave the practice card on the refrigerator and feel free to give small incentives (i.e. stickers) for practicing.

9. Invite other violin students over to join practices.

Growth, Transitions, Plateaus—To quit or Continue

We would like to assume that all teachers are completely honest and interested in the progress and wellbeing of their students. Parents depend on the teacher to be honest about whether it is working or not. The reality is that some teachers will sustain lessons for a student who is not succeeding for income reasons.

It is essential for the parent to keep tabs on the success of the lesson so that parent and student are not misled or strung along.

Musical growth and success is different for every student, and a flat plateau of little progress or frustration and tears often precedes a burst in skill. So be careful not to give up without really considering where things are.

Be aware that it is not unusual to change teachers along the way, and a good and earnest teacher will be forthright with you in transition. It also sometimes makes sense to take a “break” from lessons.

The ***best kind of practice*** is slow repetition, gradually increasing to correct tempo. It is fine to reward children with stickers or other small incentives, but significant tokens should be reserved for good practice sessions. Practice sessions can be greatly enriched by recordings made of the child's lessons. You'll enjoy these recordings as a memento of your child's growth in later years.

For most of us, criticism is easy to give and hard to accept. Use of words and tone is critical to effective, constructive, compassionate criticism. Use phrases like, “try this,” or “that was a good start,” or “how about doing it like this?”

Any tone of anger, frustration, impatience, or disapproval will not have a good result. Don't forget to praise when a breakthrough happens; praise and validate, but don't fear tears.