

Practice Time for Young Beginners

From Espie Estrella

Let's be honest, even the most eager learner might cringe when told to "practice your musical instrument every day." There's something about the word "practice" that overwhelms us and tempts us to run out the door. In the past the word practice means "drudgery" and "boring," but nowadays teachers utilize new methods of teaching music in a more engaging way. Aside from the teacher, the parent or guardian play an important role in shaping a child's future in music. Here are some tips to make practice time less of a chore and more of a fun activity.

1. Make practice time a daily routine

Sit down with your child and determine when is the best time to practice. It is important that you involve your child in this decision so as not to make him feel that he is forced to do it. In my case I find the perfect time to get my child to sit down and practice is after school, after she has rested and before doing her homework. After practice I give her free time to play before she tackles any homework. I find that she responds better with this set-up. Figure out what works best for your child and map out a daily practice time based on that.

2. Keep it short at first

For young children it is not advisable to make daily practice sessions longer than 30 minutes. Young children simply don't have the patience to sit down and concentrate on learning a musical instrument for long periods, especially if they're just beginning. On the other hand, if you see that your child is becoming more interested in learning his instrument; you can lengthen his practice time. But don't make it too long that he becomes too tired and strained in the end. Remember, take your cue from your child; never force your child.

3. Show encouragement through words and actions

Words of encouragement can go a long way when it comes to learning how to play a musical instrument. Remember to always encourage your child, take note of the progress he has made and the improvements he's showing. A smile and a hug means a lot to a child. Make practice time a time to bond with your youngster.

4. Make daily practice enjoyable and engaging

Perhaps the most important advise I can give you is to never make practice time a punishment; it will make your child dislike (or even hate) daily practice if you do so. Rather, make practice time enjoyable by showing him your support and enthusiasm. Some parents even have a daily practice chart where the child can put stickers on after every practice session. Be creative and have fun; music is meant to be enjoyed.

5. Create a comfortable practice area

Is the seat comfortable? Is there proper lighting? How about ventilation? Make sure that your practice room is comfortable for your child and that there are no distractions so he can concentrate on his pieces. Also, consider adjusting your child's practice schedule depending on the time of year. For example, during summer when there's no school and the temperature is hotter, you can schedule his practice in the mornings when it's cooler. During winter you can set his practice time in the afternoons when it's warmer.

6. Talk to your child's music teacher

If your child is taking private or group lessons, make it a point to talk to his teacher. Ask his teacher what areas your child needs to improve on so that you can implement that during your practice time at home. Don't forget to do warm-ups first, and then practice the song his teacher assigned and end the practice with a piece he already knows and enjoys. Don't let the child forget to also study his music theory.