

What Beginning Students (and Parents) Should Know When They Begin Lessons

By Katherine Baird

Starting music lessons is such an exciting experience for students. There is something almost awe-inspiring about handling an instrument and being able to make cool sounds and knowing that this will develop into songs. It feels magical. This can change over a few weeks when a student realizes that learning how to really play the instrument and expand mastery requires hard work and daily diligence. Parents can also feel overwhelmed. How do they help their child persist? Should they let them quit? After all, it seems that maybe they don't like it so much after all.

Here are some considerations as you navigate this journey.

Playing a musical instrument is one of the most profound and enjoyable ways to foster life skills, and deep and lasting relationships throughout one's life. Learning to play well requires daily practice, at least five days per week, with increasing time over the months and years. While this may seem daunting, just imagine the value this provides:

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- Time-management skills
- Patience and perseverance
- Deep listening
- Analysis of cause and effect
- Collaboration

We learn to play with others, whether in orchestra or chamber music, which teaches us how to cooperate and work as a team, lead and follow, be sensitive to others' feelings and needs. This is where lasting friendships begin. As students enter their teen years their attention is pulled in so many directions, sometimes not favorable ones. Having a peer group that works for a common purpose can give them the security and community they need to get through hard times. As older adults, musicians can always find like-minded people with whom to gather and make music. Older musicians can always find a musical community, staving off loneliness and boredom.

Now that I have hopefully persuaded you that music lessons are worth sticking with, here's the hard news: practicing can be - and usually is - hard work. We cannot be "game day" players. We need to put in the work every day. There are days when your child will say, "I hate this! I don't want to do this!", and that is okay.

Renowned therapists John and Julie Gottman have shown in research that for every single negative interaction a couple has, there needs to be five positive ones to counteract the effects of the negative interaction. Using this model, parents and teachers can collaborate to create enough positive musical experiences for the student to make the daily grind of practicing worthwhile. Create social experiences for students to have fun playing together. This could be playdates for young kids where they play a piece for each other and then have ice cream and

play in the backyard. It's heavy on fun and light on music, but it creates a positive memory of sharing what could be an isolating experience (practicing) with a friend. Prepare the student for orchestra and chamber music, sign them up for a music camp where they have an immersive and inspiring weekend or week with peers. Take them to concerts, play YouTube videos for them.

Lastly, I will confess an oft-shared frustration among music teachers: we rather resent how sports coaches usurp our students' time and claim priority, requiring our students to miss group classes, rehearsals and other incredibly valuable and important musical opportunities, opportunities that could significantly bolster a kid's musical progress. Music educators would like to see as much value placed on "team music events" as on sports. While we value team sports and the physical and social skills they foster, we feel like we're second fiddle (pun intended) to coaches. What would the world look like if more kids chose to attend orchestra or chamber music class? It's worth consideration when committing to music lessons to choose to be "all in". The bank account of music rewards us with every penny we put into it.

For suggestions on choosing the right instrument, check out [this blog](#).

May you enjoy many happy moments in your musical journey!