

5 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching and our experiences with teaching hundreds of students each year.

1. How young is to young – Starting at the Right Age

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing. We teach many beginner students in their 60's and 70's.

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Some people will tell you “the sooner the better” but this attitude can actually backfire and be a negative. IF a child is put into lessons too soon they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off music just because they had one unpleasant experience which could have been prevented. Sometimes if the child waits a year to start lessons their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually did very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

3-4 Years Old

If a pre-schooler has a keen desire and wants to start music, a group preschool music class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful in later private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work as the child has not yet experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or school and learns more effectively through the game oriented preschool environment.

Piano/Keyboard

At our school 5 years old is the youngest age that we start children in private piano lessons. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.

Guitar- Acoustic, Electric and Bass

6 years old is the earliest we recommend for guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings. Children under 8 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years old and older.

Voice Lessons

10 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. For children younger than 10, we recommend a children's choir (ages 6-9) or a preschool singing program (ages 3-5) that teaches them how to use their voices properly, in a fun, relaxed environment.

2. Insist on Private Lessons when Learning a Specific Instrument

Group classes work well for preschool music programs. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are far superior since in private lessons it is hard to miss anything, and each student can learn at their own pace. This means the teacher does not have to teach a class at middle of the road level, but has the time and focus to work on the individual student's strengths and weaknesses. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The teacher also enjoys this as they do not have to divide their attention between 5-10 students at a time and can help the student be the best they can be.

3. Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by TV, pets, a ringing phone, siblings or anything else. With only 30 to 60 minute lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at the time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments. In a music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or side-line for the teacher but a responsibility which is taken very seriously.

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4. Make Practicing Easier

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier.

- a) **Time** – Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by the parent to get the child to practice.
- b) **Repetition** - We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child 20-30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times daily. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but know if they are on repetition number 3 they are almost finished.
- c) **Rewards** – This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. Praise tends to be the most coveted award-there is just no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Sometimes we all have a week with little practicing, in that case there is always next week.

5. Use Recognized Teaching Materials

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example in piano, there are books for very young beginners, and books for adult students that have never played before.

There are books that can start you at a level you are comfortable with.

These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that at no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher left off.

Have Fun!

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So try not to put the unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.