

Learning to Play: Tips for Parents of Young Musicians

Whether you play an instrument yourself or can't even whistle, these tips will help you guide your child into the wonderful world of music-making.

Choosing the right instrument

- Ask your child what sounds she likes and what instruments appeal to her.
 - Talk to the school band or strings teacher about your child's interest, as well as her size and facial structure, before making a decision. Most beginning band and orchestra teachers let students hold and try out different instruments to help them make a choice.
 - Allow your child to explore. Many musicians started out on one instrument only to switch a few years later to another instrument with much greater success.
- Learning a musical instrument is a family affair! Your child needs your guidance and encouragement.

Practice Tips for Middle- and High-School Kids

- Help your child set up a regular time every day to practice.
- Help your child establish a routine. This may require some consultation with the teacher. A typical middle-schooler's half-hour practice routine might include:
 - Warmup—1-3 minutes
 - Play a fun, familiar piece—3-5 minutes
 - Work on a new or difficult piece—10-15 minutes
 - Work on technical requirements, such as scales or other technique builders—5 minutes
 - Play something fun to conclude the session

High school students may have more technical problems to work on, but they also have the ability to practice longer in a more concentrated way.

- 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.

By **Ardene Shafer and Christine Stinson**

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