

## Music Practice Tips FOR PARENTS *By RMTA members*

Positive parent/guardian involvement is crucial at all ages, but especially in the first few years of instrument study. Even if the parent isn't musical themselves, they can still be their child's #1 cheerleader. Here are some suggestions and activities to consider to help keep your child motivated and involved in music study. Choose one or two that might work with your child. (These are in no particular order.)

- Every music teacher's goal is to help their students become independent learners, to be able to process new information and formulate an answer. The music lesson is a practice session and what's done there is what the child should do during home practice.
- Create a daily routine of practice in a quiet space dedicated to music.
- Make sure the instrument works! Is it tuned? Is the chair/bench at a comfortable height?
- Sitting still can be a challenge especially for the young child. Start with several sessions of 5 to 10 minutes each day. Or break up a session with some yoga breaths or stretches.
- Every child learns differently and at a different pace. Refrain from comparing one child to another with regard to progress or abilities.
- Encourage your child to sing! If they can sing it, they can play it!
- Make sure your child understands the assignment. Sometimes the teachers' handwriting might be difficult to read.
- When your child is practicing, listen for a steady rhythm and offer to clap along with a steady beat when they have something ready to play for you.
- Encourage "free play"! Improvisation is just as important as reading the music. Make up a song about the rain, or the birds, or a hamster running on his wheel.
- Listen to music at home, in the car, in the garden. And all types of music! Encourage your child to dance and move to the music.
- Practice is sitting down with their instrument, playing, running scales, patterns, teaching themselves songs, writing their own songs, not JUST when they play from their "lesson books" or assigned pieces.
- Sometimes it's very intimidating, stressful or embarrassing to have a parent or anyone "watch you practice" because they might not know the material well enough yet. It could make them feel stressed to make perfect quicker than realistically possible.
- When they are ready, encourage (but don't force) your child to play for others, whether it's family, friends, or an audience of their favorite toys.
- Solitary practice is good for focus, individuality, discipline and self-esteem.
- Music study should be enjoyable for your child.
- When learning a new piece, play "detective". Have the child look for what's new, measures or notes that are the same, or almost the same. Mark them with colored pencils. Are there sharps or flats? What's the tempo? The dynamics?
- If your child has a particularly challenging practice week, use a little incentive for their brains. Line up 6-10 "rewards" on one side of the piano – chocolate chips, raisins, even baby carrots. Each time they successfully complete a practice task, they reward their brains with a treat. The positive reinforcement of giving the brain a reward, no matter how basic the reward, can be enough to get through the challenge.
- For all students – slow practice is important!
- For the advancing student, listen to several different artist recordings of their selections.
- AVOID...using a timer; correcting from the 'other room'; using practice as a punishment.
- Don't force a child to practice, but DO reward them when they do.
- The teacher understands that sometimes life gets busy and music practice takes a back seat. Attend the lesson anyway! There is always something to do. It's important to stay in a routine.

For more practice tips, visit [readingmusicteachers.org](http://readingmusicteachers.org).

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