

Congratulations on purchasing or renting an instrument for your child! You may be asking yourself: now what? It can be overwhelming to be suddenly thrust into the world of the woodwinds especially if you do not have any prior experience with musical instruments.

Never fear! I have been playing woodwinds since 1983 and teaching since 1993, so I have seen it all and experienced it all. I have compiled this information sheet for you to help you navigate the woodwind waters in the easiest way possible. Remember, your child's instrument is an investment, and taking care of it properly maintains the value.

Truthfulness from the Student

The most important thing to impress upon our budding musicians is the need to be truthful about what has happened. Most of the time, damage incurred is by the fault of the student, and most repair people and teachers understand this. It's important you get the *full and complete* story from your child. The longer a child holds out on the truth, the more money you will spend while a repair person makes unnecessary repairs trying to figure out what has happened.

Some of the most common stories will hear from your student include: dropping it on the hard school floor, banging the instrument on a metal music stand, picking up the case without latching the locks (thus dumping the instrument in pieces on to the floor), leaving their instrument on a chair and having it knocked off by another student.

Whatever your child tells you, you should always reassure them that they are *not* going to get in trouble (by you, me or their repair shop) if they tell the truth. You can always tell them, if they seem shy to tell you what happened, that they can tell me directly. I'm always available for this purpose.

Here is what I tell the students in their first lesson so you can reinforce this yourself: *"When something happens to your instrument, it's important for you to tell me the truth about what happened to it. You're not going to get in trouble, and no one is going to get mad at you, or take away your instrument. Everyone hurts their instrument in some way, even me, but if you don't tell the truth about what happened, then no one can fix it."*

Carelessness by the Student

Besides the more common excuses you will hear, please keep in mind the kids often damage their instruments without even knowing they're doing it. These kinds of things include: not putting the instrument in the case correctly, having something in the case that doesn't belong in there, eating before they play, mashing bridge keys while putting it together, forcing the instrument together without twisting, or holding the instrument wrong when they put it together. I go over proper procedures in their lessons but that doesn't mean they always follow these instructions when they are alone or in a hurry at school. Please reinforce with your child the importance of following all the directions I give them in their lessons about putting together, taking apart and care of their instruments.

Do surprise inspections of your child's case! Be sure the only things in there are supposed to be in there. The instrument has its place, and there are places for swabs, reeds and reed cases, but they should not be storing music, food, toys, pencils, etc. in the same compartment as their instrument.

Music Stores vs Specialized Repair People

Nothing frustrates me more than the “advice” salespeople at big box music stores give to inexperienced parents and students. Please please please keep in mind that they work on commission. The advice they give and accessories they sell you often create more problems than they solve.

If you have *any* questions regarding the care and maintenance of your child’s instrument, the first people you should talk to are *me or your child’s school band director*. One of us will also recommend who and where to go for further help with the repairs.

Don’t be dazzled by lower repair costs at big box music stores. You are handing over your instrument to non-specialized technicians, and that’s a scary prospect in my book. If you are renting your instrument from a small, local music store (i.e. Pedersons or Baxter), you are likely to get good repairs. Remember, if you are renting your instrument from them, the price of repair may be included in your rental costs.

What to Expect with Each Instrument

Do not be fooled: you do not need to replace all the pads on your instrument all at once. There is no “set time frame” to have this done, either. With all woodwinds, you should expect to replace one or two pads as recommended by your repair person. Never the entire set! So if someone tries to sell you that giant repair, you should get a second opinion.

It is very common for springs to catch on your child’s clothing. This will cause keys not to move, and the instrument to stop playing altoegher. Just bring the instrument to me or your band teacher for quick (and free!) help.

NEVER TURN ANY SCREWS ON THE INSTRUMENT!! I can’t stress this enough. All the screws are set to very fine tolerances that only qualified musicians, teachers and repair people should adjust.

No woodwind instruments “need a bath” or a “cleaning”. Do not expose your instrument to soap or water ever. Doing so will damage the instrument, sometimes beyond repair.

All Intermediate, Conservatory and Professional instruments should have *routine maintenance* once a year. Regardless of instrument, your yearly check-up will include: testing, replacement and re-seating of pads, sealing leaks, oiling and adjusting of key mechanisms, testing the headjoint cork (flute), testing and replacement of cork tenons, quieting key clicks, polish of metal instruments, oiling and filling any cracks in wooden instruments. There are countless other adjustments and repairs that may be recommended by your repair person, so this is by no means a complete list! Just enough to give you an idea what to expect.

Price? Realistically, you should plan on spending \$100-\$500 (or more) each year on these check-ups depending on the work that needs to be done and the quality of the instrument you’re bringing in. With regular maintenance, the price should stay lower.

FLUTE

Some things you should do on your own to maintain your flute: never use cork grease or valve oil on your joints. If they collect a dark residue, you can gently wipe the inside and outside of the joints with rubbing alcohol on a soft cloth. You do not need any sort of lubricant to get your flute together as long as the joints remain clean. Be sure the flute is sitting securely in its case before you close it.

Always use the soft silver cloth that comes with your flute to clean fingerprints, skin oils and saliva off of your flute and clean your instrument (using a cotton cloth on the cleaning rod provided) every time you put it away. Some music stores try to sell you a “flute swab” that looks suspiciously like an oboe swab. Truth: there’s no such thing as a “flute swab”, and the last thing you want is something rough like silk and the metal sinker on a swab dragging through your delicate metal flute. Some students have found the new “wand” cleaners to be easier and more effective than the traditional cloth. Speak to me in your lesson if you have any questions about cleaning your flute.

OBOE & CLARINET

Some things you should do on your own to maintain your oboe or clarinet: use cork grease on your tenons whenever you find it’s getting difficult to put the instrument together, always swab your instrument (swab inserted in to the bell) before you put it away, and be sure the instrument is sitting securely in the case before closing the lid. If you have a wooden oboe or clarinet, swabbing is even more important. Do not “oil” the wood of your instrument yourself.

Clarinet & Saxophone

Both use the same kind of mouthpiece and are notorious for collecting ...things... This is the *only part of your clarinet or saxophone that can touch water*. I recommend at least once a month (or as needed) washing your mouthpiece with gentle dish soap to remove any residue from the inside and outside of your mouthpiece.

SAXOPHONE

The most important thing to know is that saxophone keys are padded with leather (flutes & clarinets use cloth/felt, oboes use cork). The more expensive your saxophone, the more expensive those pads. The pads are held in place with rivets that also get more expensive as the instrument increases in quality. The last thing you want is a repair person who tells you that you need *all new pads* on your saxophone. This is probably the most expensive proposition of all the woodwinds. *Do not do it without a second opinion*. And definitely do not have this done at a large chain music store. Use a qualified saxophone repair specialist (several listed below) or someone from a small local store only.

What you can do to maintain your saxophone: use cork grease only on the mouthpiece tenon. Like the flute, you can use rubbing alcohol on a soft cloth to clean the gunk from the metal neck joint. You do not need any lubricant on the joint if it is cleaned properly.

The most common damage done to a saxophone is bending the entire body. Many kids like to lift their saxophone out of the case by sticking their hand in the bell. Over time, this will twist and bend the instrument. The student won’t notice the instrument is bent until they try to put it in the

case and notice it doesn't fit right anymore. The proper way to lift your saxophone out of the case is to grab it around the middle of the body, grasp around the keys firmly, and lift straight out. Brass is a highly malleable metal, so the saxophone will sustain more body damage than the other woodwinds.

CELLO

Just because your new string instrument doesn't appear to have as many screws, springs, gadgets and gizmos, make no mistake that it is a delicate piece of artwork and needs to be taken care of accordingly. Always wash your hands before you play your cello!

Every day, when you finish practicing, you should use a soft cloth to wipe the rosin off of your bow, strings and fingerboard. Always loosen the bow (I tell the kids 3 "left" turns) before you put it away. Just remember to tighten it 3 "right" turns before you play! Always protect your cello from falling on to the bridge. Do not prop it up against your chair, or lay it on its back. Always lay it on its side. Do not use any polish or solvents on your cello.

Sometimes the tuning pegs (on the scroll) will "pop" out of place. Have your mom or dad push the peg back into the wood (strong, firm pushing while turning clockwise) then tune the string. Students should mostly be turning the fine tuning pegs at the bottom of the instrument if they need to be tuned at all.

REPAIR-PEOPLE

This is a list of repair people that I recommend for each instrument. None of these people will oversell you or convince you you need something done beyond what is actually necessary. Their pricing is fair, so remember if you invested in an Intermediate, Conservatory or Professional instrument, it is worth every penny to have a skilled and specialized repairperson do the work.

Flute:

Paul Rabinov
(818) 249-1659
prabinov@sbcglobal.net

Paulie Davis
(818) 427-1070
paulieft@gmail.com

Oboe:

John Peterson, RDG Woodwinds
john@rdgwoodwinds.com

Michele Forrest
(626) 345-1730
michele@oboefix.com

Clarinet:

Roberts

(626) 644-9219
stevebobs@hotmail.com

Saxophone:

Manny Gavrilov
(323) 876-9662

Ross Steidinger
Baxter Northrup, Studio City
(818) 321-3262

Strings:

Benning Violins
11340 Ventura Blvd., Studio City
1-818-762-1374
info@benningviolins.com