



Nine Quick Tips for Parents of Young Music Students

Over the past 30 years, I've been on both sides of the education process, as an instructor and as a parent. I'd like to share just a few of the things that have been successful for my students, their parents, as well as when practicing with my own kids:

If the guitar fits...

Just like other many other instruments, guitars come in different sizes. While having some "room to grow into" applies to buying clothes and shoes for our growing kids, *this adage does NOT apply when it comes to buying guitars.*

A guitar that is too large puts any student at an incredible disadvantage, causes unnecessary frustration in the learning process, and can even cause students to form long-term physical problems in their approach to the instrument. (Visit www.stlguitar.com to download the **Guitar Buying Guide**, which you can print and take with you to the store.) *Tip: If you must err on purchasing a guitar too large or too small, go for the smaller instrument.*

Quality counts.

Regarding guitars, please purchase the highest-quality instrument that you can comfortably afford. A cheap, junky guitar will *sound* like a cheap, junky guitar no matter what your child does, and they will quickly lose interest in playing! *Remember: Famous name-brands are infamously not necessarily the best...*



YOU learn to tune the guitar.

Trying to practice on an out-of-tune guitar is frustrating, or - maybe even worse - the awful sound is simply ignored by the child. Tuning is very quick and easy skill for adults to learn, and there are free apps (I just love **Guitar Tuna**) and inexpensive clip-on tuners (**D'Addario** and **Snark** make my favorites) to help you get the job done.

Tip: If you're buying a stand-alone tuner, have the salesperson show you how to use it!

"Play-around time" is time very well spent!

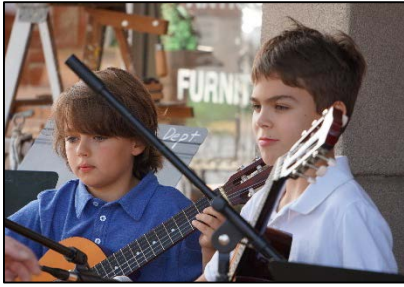
Encourage your child to *play around* on the guitar. What sounds can it make? What happens if you press here? There? What if you strum the strings? What if you pluck the strings? Help your child learn to be *respectful* to the instrument, but to really *explore* it!

Consistency of practice beats "cramming in" practice.

No beating around the bush here: *Parents, it is your responsibility to help your child form good practice habits.*

Students should leave their first several lesson already having learned their basic assignments. In this case, you can help by reminding them to get the guitar out and play through their assignment (maybe try for four times each week?).

Meeting resistance? That's OK, don't take it personally. Being the smart and resourceful adults we are, we can suggest things like "Let's call Grandma and give her a phone/Skype concert!" Or, have them give a "concert" to their stuffed animals. Maybe offer to cook your child their favorite meal if they practice four days this week. Be fun and inventive!



Bring practice into the family.

Don't isolate the practicer. For most kids, being sent to their room to practice is a very bad idea. Our kids don't like to admit it, but they love to have our attention. Even if we're are busy, they could give an "Mom's-Emptying-the-Dishwasher" concert, a "Dad's-Setting-the-Table" concerts, etc.

Attend your child's lessons.

For one thing, attending the lessons helps to validate what your child is doing in their eyes. It also helps you to know what your child is working on, which you can then help reinforce at home. You don't have to be actively studying the guitar to catch what you need to know in order to help at home; we're adults, and they are kids, and it's up to us to help them remember these things.

Here's an example: I know nothing of martial arts, yet my daughter wanted to take Shotokan karate and we signed her up. At the end of class, her sensei always gave her clear instructions on what to work on at home. "Grace, do the *(something-something)* kata three times each day, and make sure your kicks can clear a bucket like this one." Again, I know *nothing* of Shotokan karate, but I could remember those simple directions (OK, I mean I'd write them down), and could remind my daughter each day.

Get rid of the egg timer.

I'm often asked for my recommendations about the length of daily practice time. So here it is: *I do not have a daily practice time requirement for kids until they've been taking lessons for quite some time.*

Kids are hyper-aware of their environments compared to adults, which causes an exaggerated sense of time. Sentencing a child to ten minutes of practice is, in many cases, mentally "painful" to the child. Not only that, most kids don't have 10 minutes of material to practice each day until after several months of lessons!

Focus instead on quality repetitions of material: If the student is seven, then play the assignment seven times at each practice session. Perhaps one day each week, use a spinner from a game, or roll a dice, or pull a card from a deck of cards, and repeat the assignment that many times.

Be a good audience for your child.

Don't worry about correcting every little mistake you hear - this is your child's instructor's job, and it's best to leave it to them. Your job is what it's always been: to encourage, motivate, love, enjoy, and be proud of your kids. You are, after all, their biggest fan!

Good luck,

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