

5 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS

1. HOW YOUNG IS TOO YOUNG – STARTING AT THE RIGHT AGE

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing they are to commit to practicing. We have had 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. Here are some guidelines:

PIANO At our school age 4 is the youngest age that we start children in private lessons. Success is dependent on their attention span, which varies from one child to the next at age 4. By age 5, children have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.

GUITAR Age 7 or 8 is a good age to begin guitar lessons. Young children will need a smaller instrument, suited to their size. At the younger ages, a parent's supervision is vital to progress. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years of age or older.

VOICE Vocal lessons are not recommended for students under the age of 8. Vocal damage can occur if the voice is "pushed" at too young an age. Full vocal technique would not begin until age 10. Because of 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 complete vocal technique.

FLUTE, CLARINET, SAXOPHONE Due to lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone the size of the instrument), we recommend that most

woodwind beginners be at least 9 years of age with the exception of the flute which can be started a few years earlier.

TRUMPET AND OTHER BRASS Brass instruments require physical exertion and lung power. Students should be at least 9 years of age or older.

2. INSIST ON PRIVATE LESSONS WITH A TEACHER WHO IS QUALIFIED

In our school, we offer group lessons only in *PianoKids*® for young children. Children at the age respond well to the motivation of a group and the group setting allows for development of ear-training and singing skills.

However, for older students and other instruments, 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 allows the teacher to focus on the individual student's strengths and weaknesses. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. Studying with a qualified teacher is very important in establishing good fundamentals for the enjoyment of playing. Many of the teachers in our school are University trained professionals. Our younger teachers go through a training program in the summer where the principles of teaching are developed. They receive continuous training and guidance throughout the year. Teachers are also selected for their ability to communicate and motivate children.

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, ringing phones, siblings

or anything else. 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 sideline for the teacher but a responsibility which is taken very seriously.

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 conflict between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some tips to make practicing easier:

TIME Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routing or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required by parents to get the child to practice.

REPETITION For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, try repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3, they are almost finished.

REWARDS Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. Praise tends to be the coveted wards – there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Some families keep a chart on the fridge and the child receives a sticker for each day of practicing. Listen to your child practice from time to time and be encouraging.

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. It is important the materials are suited to the age of a student. For example, a 5 year-old child will learn in a different manner from a 13 year-old beginner. The selection of music must also appeal to the age group. In our school, age appropriate material is chosen for each student to ensure maximum success and enjoyment in the learning process.

HAVE FUN!!

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. So, try not to put 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.

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