

THE STUDENT/TEACHER/PARENT TRIANGLE

Parents often ask me how their child can be a good piano student as well as enjoy music. Here are some guidelines to help you achieve that goal together.

The student, teacher and parent are equal in their importance when a child is taking piano lessons. The child will be a good student only if all three of these people are applying equal effort, communicating clearly and cooperating with each other. Of course, this will look different at different ages in the child's development. Teenagers require support, commitment and encouragement from the parent, while the younger child requires practice help as well.

THE ROLE OF THE PARENT

1. You must provide a quiet and safe learning environment at home. The child needs to be free from distractions and time pressures, money concerns, fatigue, fear of failure, and in the case of younger children, the responsibility of daily practice (that is the parent's responsibility).
2. You should plan one or two practice sessions daily, preferably at the same time each day, which fit into the child's regular routine. If the child is eight years old or younger, a parent should be available to work with the child during the lesson. Older children still require the parent to be nearby and semi-involved. Parents should check with the child to see if they have completed all of their work each week. Teenagers need for the parent to be aware that they are practicing and to require practice just as homework at school is required.
3. Parents of all students, including teenagers, should be checking assignment sheets weekly and talking to the teacher if it appears the child is not getting good evaluations, is not understanding their assignment or has too much or too little work assigned.
4. Remember: you as a parent decide what will be important in your child's life—values, discipline and use of time. Parents are essential to the optimum quality of music lessons.

PIANO PRACTICE

Successful and rewarding music study depends on consistent daily practice. Many repetitions are necessary for success. Review is crucial. The reward is when the student can play something of beauty at a moment's notice. Expectations are important: children can play beautifully at whatever level they are at.

The mechanics of good practice are as follows:

1. Ideally, practice should be daily—i.e., 'practice only on the days you eat'. Plan ahead so that practice happens before other activities pre-empt it.
2. Practice must be regular. Routine and consistency are paramount, just like a regular bedtime or mealtime. Regular practice is a commitment.
3. Practice should be approached with an attitude of joy, not punishment.
4. Practice must be of sufficient time to be productive. It is more important that the student practice well and follow directions than that they sit at the piano for a

- given amount of time. The student should be encouraged to review old songs and practice favorite songs as much as they like, but only after the regular assignment has been completed.
5. Practice must be of the best quality that the student is capable of producing. Only correct practice is of value. Sitting cross-legged and humped over the piano while slamming through their pieces will not produce good results.
 6. The practice environment must be free from distractions and attractive to the child. There must be an instrument capable of producing a beautiful tone. The piano should be kept in good repair and tuned once or twice yearly. There should be adequate lighting and comfortable seating. Younger children may need pads and foot support in order to be comfortable.

THE PARENT'S ROLE IN HELPING WITH PRACTICE

1. Keep your priorities straight. The child comes first, the music is second. The child must feel emotionally safe and comfortable.
2. Praise the act, not the child. Say 'you played beautiful dynamics' or 'you played very evenly that time'. Don't tell the child 'you are great'. You do not want to create false expectations that can't always be lived up to.
3. State your boundaries: 'We're doing practice at _____ time'. The child needs the security of clear rules. It also helps support the teacher. Remember that good hand position, tone, fingering, etc. are a necessary part of practice. Provide choices within those boundaries. Give the student appropriate choices only.
4. Allow the student the freedom to make mistakes sometimes. Let them evaluate their own performance before telling them what they did wrong.
5. Be honest. Never give false praise, but always be positive. If a child is still struggling with technique, counting or whatever, you can say 'Good effort' or 'It's coming, now let's work on that counting together', but don't criticize harshly.
6. Always guide the student with love. Give lots of smiles, applause, respect and joy over the child's efforts. 'You really tried...Good for you!' Remember: the child is most important, not perfection or expectations.

Music can be a fun and rewarding experience, with the proper training and guidance. Congratulations on deciding to provide your child with a music education.