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Encouraging Your Child to Practice

Learning a musical instrument is a team effort - the student, teacher and parent are all in this together. You as a parent can trust that, during the lesson, the teacher is addressing the topic of practicing. And during the rest of the week, there are many things you can do to guide and encourage your child to a point of self-motivation. As there are many ideas herein, they can’t all be applied to every child. It is up to you to decide which may be relevant to your child’s situation.

1. Be realistic in your expectations. A ten minute session two to three times a week, is fine for a beginner child. As the musical workload increases, so should the practice time and frequency.
2. The parent’s attitude is everything. Keep it fun and upbeat. “Let’s do it!”
3. Establish a weekly schedule, i.e. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.
4. Establish a weekday routine that sees the practice session occurring at the same time each allotted day [e.g. after supper]. It’s even more effective to attach the practice session to something fun [i.e. video games]. This way, the child knows that each day after school or after supper, comes music practice and then video games.
5. Is fatigue an issue? Some kids are at their best in the mornings, before going to school.
6. Don’t expect your child to sit down with the instrument on their own. It’s ok if you have to prompt them every single time - do they brush their teeth each day without a reminder? Mind you, by the second year of musical study, children who are still interested in pursuing music should gradually become more independent about this.
7. Is the environment conducive to practicing music? Does your child have an area free from noise and distractions? Is there a music stand?
8. Is the instrument the child’s choice or YOUR choice? Is your child being forced to learn classical or folk music when they really want rock ‘n roll? Are they playing piano when they would prefer the guitar?
9. Is the instrument the right size? Is it properly set-up?
10. Make sure you are giving adequate praise for each accomplishment, small or large. Never make negative remarks about how your child’s playing sounds.
11. It’s important for you and your child to understand that learning happens in stages. It is common to find that some passages of music take a long time to master, and others are accomplished right away. The important thing to emphasize is that consistent practice WILL produce results.

Here is a sample practice session. The suggested times are indicated first for a beginner or young child, and then in brackets for an intermediate student.

- Warm-up - 1 (or 3) mins
- A familiar piece, something fun - 2 (or 5) mins
- The current, difficult pieces - 5 (or 15) mins
- Technical requirements, scales, etc. - 1 (or 5) mins
- A final light, fun piece - 1 (or 2) mins