

Dear Beginning Parent

(from Kay Collier Slone's *They're Rarely Too Young And Never Too Old to Twinkle*)

I have sat in your chair several times for I have twice been a beginning Suzuki parent. I'm still a Suzuki parent, and that's not much different – just a little more time put in at lessons and practice. Being a Suzuki parent has not changed my initial response to what my child is doing. It has caused major changes in my expectation and what I do with my reaction. (Usually!).

If your child is like every other child I've ever known, he or she will definitely learn to play their chosen instrument. Along the way, he will most certainly – at one time or another:

- *Lie down on the floor when everyone else is standing up*
- *Stand up when everyone else is lying down*
- *Interrupt a lesson with a rambling discourse – definitely not on music*
- *Seem more interested in the mechanics of the instrument than in playing*
- *Have times when he feels more sleepy, hungry, angry, lazy than he does musical*
- *Have times when he'll declare he hates violin (or you!)*
- *Resists and test your ideas about habit building, especially concerning practice*
- *Get to a lesson and do absolutely nothing he has worked on at home*
- *Make pronouncements to the teacher regarding your practice or lack of, listening or lack of, home life family problems, and secrets etc.*
- *Appear to you to be the only one out of step in the entire class*
- *Drop his violin on hits bridge or delicate part*
- *Have an attention span of 5 to 10 minutes and sometimes only 5 to 10 seconds – maximum 30!*
- *Deliberately do things “backward” or “incorrectly.”*

It's funny – I can appreciate these actions and reaction in the other kids in the class. As a mater of fact, I think they're cut and funny, well, just terrific to be making the progress they're making. It's exciting to watch learning happen. With my own, sometimes I want to sit on my hands, bit my tongue, hide my face, duck my head or maybe yell! I am learning, over the years, that my kids sense it when I feel that way, and they become nervous and less confident. What they need most from me is:

- *My interest – I'm here. I care*
- *My faith. I believe he or she can learn to play the violin, cello, piano.*
- *My enthusiasm. This is a neat thing to do. I dig it.*
- *My respect – for him – his very real efforts, his concentration, his personhood. For his teacher – his ideas, advice, interested, ability, training.*
- *My enjoyment – of every step along the way.*
- *My acceptance – indicated by a pleasant expression on my face at lesson, class and practice.*
- *My praise – of every small success.*

This is habit building I'm still working on – every day. My expectations for my children are high because I want so much for them, and because I want to protect them. Its' also involved with my own image of myself, and whether the teacher or other parent will see me as a good, effective parent. I am trying to remember that our teacher sees my child working very hard and she know that although mine is the only one in this particular class insisting on taking his shoes off because the teacher did, she's seen this before, and is not bothered - so I'll try to restrain my mother sigh and roll of the eyes.

My goal for this year is to relax and try to enjoy my own child as much as I'll enjoy yours. I hope this will be your goal too. Welcome!

What is the Suzuki Method?

Suzuki (1989-1998) was a violinist, educator, philosopher, and humanitarian. After World War II, Suzuki devoted his life to the development of the method he called “Talent Education.” He observed that children the world over learn to speak their native language with ease. Applying the basic principles of language acquisition to learning music, Suzuki called his method the “mother-tongue approach.” Musical ability is not an inborn talent but a skill, which can be developed in any child who is properly trained. At the heart of the Suzuki Philosophy are some basic principles of language learning (** below) that can be transferred to music education to help create a path that is more successful and enjoyable for you and your child.

Parent Involvement: When a child learns to talk, it is the parents who function most effectively as teacher. Parents have an important role as “home teachers” in learning an instructor, too. In the beginning, one parent often learns to play before the child, so they understand what the child is expected to do. The parent attends the child’s lesson and group class and the two practice together at home.

Early Beginning: The early years are crucial for developing mental processes and muscle coordination. Listening to music should begin at birth, formal training may begin at age three or four.

****Listening:** Children learn words after hearing them spoken hundreds of times by others. Listening to music every day is important, especially listening to the pieces in the Suzuki repertoire so the child knows them intimately.

****Repetition:** Constant repetition is essential in learning to play an instrument. Child do not learn a word or a piece of music and then discard it. They add it to their vocabulary or repertoire gradually using it in new and more sophisticated ways.

****Encouragement:** As with language, the child’s efforts to learn an instrument should be met with sincere praise and encouragement. Each child learns at his/her own rate, building on small steps so that each one can be mastered. This creates an environment of enjoyment for child, parent, and teacher.

**** Review:** When a new word or phrase is brought into the vocabulary it is used, not simply learned then set aside. Similarly, your child must review all of the previous pieces to establish a solid foundation of technique that will allow for successful progression to more advanced material.

Learning with Other Children: In addition to private lessons, children participate in regular group lessons and performances at which they learn from and are motivated by each other.

Graded Repertoire: Children do no practice exercise to learn to talk, but use language for its natural purpose of communication and self-expression. Pieces in the Suzuki repertoires are designed to present one or two new technical problem to learned in the context of the piece.

Delayed Reading: Children are taught to read after their ability to talk has been well established. In the same way, children should have a basic technical competence on their instrument before begin taught to read music.

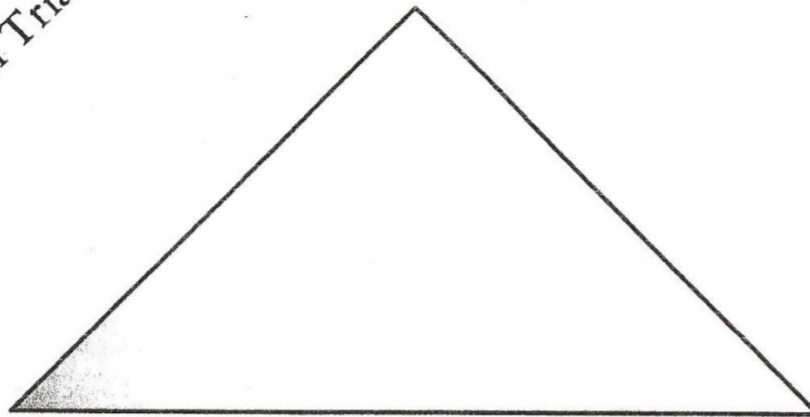
Source: The Suzuki Twinkler, a fact sheet published by the Suzuki Association of the Americas.

The Suzuki Triangle

Student

Parent

Teacher



The Suzuki student will...

- listen to recordings daily.
- review previous repertoire.
- cooperate with parent and teacher during practice and lesson.
- treat parents and teacher with respect.*
- be prepared for lesson and practice session (trim nails, drink, etc).*

The Suzuki parent will ...

- take notes during lesson.
- ask questions if assignments are unclear.
- oversee assignments for daily practice set by teacher.
- monitor review and listening.
- works with teacher and student to decide when it is appropriate to let the student begin to practice on their own.
- encourage student.
- make note of small as well as large accomplishments.
- make sure instrument is properly maintained.*
- pay promptly and in full for all lessons.*
- attend all classes as outlined by teacher.*

The Suzuki teacher will...

- establish a set of goals (short and long term) for student and parent to work on together.
- encourage student and parent.
- provide parent with clear and concise instruction to follow for practice and listening.
- determine progression of study.
- continue personal education in Suzuki Method.
- keep the lesson progressing in a timely and efficient manner.
- maintain membership and participation in professional organizations pertaining to Suzuki Method/String teaching.
- provide opportunities for performance.*
- teach lessons at appointed time except in cases of family emergency or prior arrangement.*

* Kempter, Susan. Between Parent and Teacher: A Plan for Nurturing Suzuki Students at Home. SHAR Publications, 1991.

Delayed Note Reading – Why?

Why delay note reading?

Learning to play an instrument requires attention to many physical movements and posture points. Coordinating these movements and posture points feels very awkward to a beginning student, but they are crucial. Holding the instrument correctly not only ensures that your child will play with the best tone and intonation – it also ensures they will not experience unnecessary tension or stress. Your child will learn to play their instrument comfortably and efficiently.

When note reading is introduced, your child's attention is diverted away from physical aspects of playing. If introduced too early, note reading may impede your child's development of good posture. The advantage of delayed note reading is that your child will be able to focus on the mechanics of plying their instrument and develop good posture, balance, and tone. Once posture becomes second nature, your child will be ready for note reading.

How do Suzuki students learn a piece of music?

Suzuki students learn to play by ear. After listening to a recording of a piece many times, they use their 'musical ear' along with their knowledge of the logic of their instrument to figure out the notes.

How do you learn by ear?

There are several steps to developing an ear for music, but the most important aspect of training your ear is to listen to the Suzuki recordings every day! Obviously you can't play a piece by ear if you don't know the piece. Listening is vital. You can listen in the car, while you're getting ready in the morning, setting the table for dinner, etc.

Singing is also an excellent way to help your child learn a piece. Many students and their parents make up words to the Suzuki pieces and use them to sing along with the recordings. The sillier the words the better!

Your private and group class instructors will begin the first steps in ear training. They will begin by teaching your child to distinguish the difference between two notes of the same pitch vs. two notes of a different pitch. (Pitch refers to how high or low a sound is.). This ability is refined so that your child is able to tell which note is higher or lower in pitch.

Once your child understands the concept of pitch direction his/her teacher will begin to teach them the logic of their instrument. Specifically, how to make a note higher or lower on their instrument by using different fingers and strings.

After listening to a piece until they understand in terms of pitch direction (are the notes in a particular passage getting higher or lower or staying the same?) your child will be able to use their "ear" along with their knowledge of their instrument to figure out the correct notes in the piece.

When will my child learn to read music?

Early in your child's training, your teacher will integrate note reading concepts into their lesson. For example, your teacher will introduce note names (A, B, C sharp etc) instead of "finger numbers" (1st finger, 2nd finger, etc.). Understanding note names rather than relying on a finger number system is extremely important for learning to read music later on.

When your teacher feels that your child is comfortable with the mechanics of playing, he/she will slowly begin to introduce note reading into lesson time. While each student progresses at his/her own pace, most students will begin note reading while working in Suzuki Book 2.

The Private Lesson ...

One very important component of the Suzuki Method is the Private Lesson. Private lessons are a chance for your child and you to interact directly with the private teacher. Private lessons are generally when new material is introduced and when we work to refine already learned skills. Your teachers have been specially trained to teach the Suzuki Repertoire in a very particular way and will let you know what and when the next step will be. Here are few other guidelines to help in your private lesson experience:



Parent to Parent:

How to Help your Child at his Lesson

by Juliana McAshan

Attend lessons regularly and teach your child to watch lessons in progress if he must wait his turn. The best way to do this is to watch the lesson yourself. This indicates to your child that something important is going on, and also gives him a role for good behavior.

When you practice at home, use the same routines and sequence of events that you observe at the lesson. Use the same language and practice the same exercises that the teacher uses. The teacher is watching for signs that these exercises have become easy and natural for the child, so that he will be ready for the next steps in his learning.

Often a child will appear to be forgetful at his lesson, or do poorly in exercises which he did well at home. Do not become alarmed at this or interfere by giving him hints and reminders while he is trying to pay attention to his teacher. The reason he is having difficulty is that he is working with a relatively unfamiliar person. By "helping" too much you will only postpone the day when the relationship between the teacher and the child is an easy and natural one. The child's attention should be centered on his lesson; his work is with the teacher. You can best help him to focus his attention by not intruding on his work.

If you have your child's best interests at heart, let him make mistakes, because the lesson is a learning process. He is learning through his errors; he is also learning that it is all right to take a chance and that a mistake is not the end of the world.

If a child makes many mistakes in his lesson, do not scold him but resolve to practice more and better with him before the next lesson. Good practice is always the cure for bad lessons.

Sometimes, the teacher will invite the parent to participate. At such times, a complete response is expected, so pay close attention to the lesson.

Bring a notebook to the lesson and write down the important points as the teacher presents them. Study the notes before practice times. If you do this, the child will make steady progress, and will soon be ready for the next step in his learning.

About younger brothers and sisters at the lesson . . . they are always welcome to come, to listen and to learn, but this must never be at the expense of the child receiving instruction.

When watching the lessons of other children, show interest in these students, but avoid making comparisons between your child and others. Such comparisons can be unfair to all concerned, especially since you know a great deal about your own child and very little about the backgrounds of the others.

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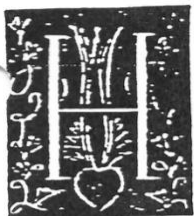
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How to Help your Child at Home

by Lorraine Fink

- P** practice regularly, every day --seven days a week-- no matter how many other demands present themselves.
- P** lay the artist's recording of the music being learned. Do this casually, several times a day, without concern for whether the children are listening attentively.
- T** he age of your child will be a major factor in your approach to practice. If your child is a pre-schooler, keep the elements of a game in high priority since learning takes place best when an activity is fun.
- L** et your child have some say about the schedule for daily practice. Make a chart showing the times that you have both agreed to and post it as a reminder.
- B** e enthusiastic yourself about practice time!
- F** ind an interesting practice routine that will cover the tasks to be done. List the assignments for the week and decide in what order they will be practiced. This can be done by using a prepared chart, by drawing lottery cards, or by some other system.
- P** recious moments between parent and child for making music and working together should not have to be shared with a younger sibling. Make special arrangements if necessary.
- K** now (ask your teacher) what is reasonable to expect. Children learn at different rates, but excessive demands (or leniency) as a regular diet will create tensions and disinterest.
- A** ctively involve your child in determining specifically what is to be learned and how to go about it. Do not tell him what the teacher said -- ask him.
- L** earn how to work in very small steps -- one note, two notes, a measure. Connect one small step to another and rejoice in the progress.
- M** otivate your student by making a chart which shows his progress. Be creative!
- T** ape your practice sessions. The child hears himself. You hear yourself. You both are sure to get some objective feedback.
- L** earning the notes, fingering and other technicalities is the beginning of study for a musical piece. Only through mastery will it contribute to the building of permanent skills.
- N** ever begin work on a new piece unless your teacher has suggested or approved it.
- B** e generous with encouraging remarks, even though a good effort may not have produced successful results. Treat "praise" with caution, avoid verbalizing irritation, and reward your child with your love and appreciation.
- A** s you advance in the repertoire, spend more and more time reviewing and improving the pieces learned.
- O** nce or twice a week, give a home concert for the parent who does not usually supervise the practice sessions. Include bowing and applause.
- S** ense when a practice session is over. It is more important to return to the instrument with joy and enthusiasm tomorrow than to force a few extra minutes today.

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LEARNED LIFE SKILLS THROUGH THE SUZUKI APPROACH

"Music is the language of the heart without words"

Suzuki teachers do not teach an instrument but the whole child, the instrument is the medium.

- Focus and concentration
- Memory – identifying patterns
- Coordination – fine motor control
- Learn how to follow directions
- Communicate questions
- Rise to challenges
- Problem solving
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Goal making
- Pride in work well done
- Ambition
- Ownership
- Realize ones potential
- Time management
- Confidence/Self esteem
- Self discipline
- Respect
- Self expression
- Creativity
- Sensitivity
- Humility
- Membership in the world
- Commitment
- Performance skills
- Leadership
- Group skills
- Team work
- Music appreciation

Suzuki's greatest desire was to enable all children to have high values, fine sensibilities, and beautiful hearts.