

Here's a little information we've compiled especially for you...

## **SIX Ways to Get the MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS**

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding experience learning an instrument. These are practical tips we have discovered from years of experience teaching hundreds of students each year.

### **1. The Differences between Suzuki and Traditional Lessons - Which One Will Work Best for You?**

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki based his approach on applying the "Mother Tongue" method, which recognizes all children learn the native tongue of their environment due to repetitive, constant exposure. A child will effortlessly learn to speak English, for example... After all, the child's parents speak English, other children, etc. Dr. Suzuki realized music could be learned in the same way. He developed a method that focused on learning music aurally (by ear and by rote) with a supportive environment. In order to shape the child's musical brain, the phrase "the younger the better" applies.

Consequently, parents *must* be involved in the lessons and interact with the child musically at home by helping during practice time, taking notes during lessons, listening to the Suzuki repertoire CD with the child, etc. A monthly Group lesson is also part of the Suzuki curriculum. All in all, compared to traditional lessons, much more involvement and commitment is expected from the parent.

Traditional methods also have chosen methodologies, but the parent does not have to be a part of the lesson if they chose not to be (although in some cases, we have found parental involvement to be very beneficial). Also, there are no group lessons for traditional methods. Traditional students usually begin by learning to read music, whereas Suzuki students do not learn to read music right away, they first learn by ear. Occasionally teachers will supplement the Suzuki repertoire with music reading curriculum as found in traditional lessons.

Traditional and Suzuki lesson are both good methods and each have their place in a learning environment. You need to talk with our staff and choose the right method for you! Here's a quick summary:

<b>SUZUKI</b>	<b>TRADITIONAL</b>
Music is learned aurally and by rote	Music is learned using printed music
Parental involvement required	Parental involvement optional
Group lessons utilized	No group lessons

### **2. How Young is Too Young - What Age Should I Start Lessons?**

Adults can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing. We teach many beginner students in their 60's and 70's.

For children, starting lessons at the right age is CRUCIAL! Whether Suzuki or traditional, attention spans need to be developed and a genuine desire is valuable. Parental involvement is also beneficial regardless of the chosen method of learning. Having an activity with their parent is so wonderful for a child.

The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can usually be to start taking music lessons for each instrument we teach in our studios. Factors for this list include size of child compared with size of instrument and physical, technical challenge in playing their instrument. The child's maturity, attention span, etc. are also to be considered by you.

#### **1 - 3 Years Old**

If a pre-schooler (or younger) has an earnest desire and wants to start music, Kindermusik class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful in later private lessons. At age 3 traditional private lessons are usually not geared for someone that young, however, Suzuki lessons could be.

## **Piano/Keyboard**

At our school, 5 years old is the youngest age at which children can begin private piano lessons (however, have accepted 3 and 4 years olds when suitable). Whether Suzuki or traditional method, the lessons will be more successful when the parent actively participates. At age 5 they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease, but having a parent assist is invaluable. If your child is younger than 3, we will typically recommend you enroll them in a Kindermusik class.

## **Electric/Acoustic Guitar • Electric Bass**

4 years old is usually the earliest we recommend for guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings, and coordinating both hands to make a musical sound is challenging at first. Bass guitar students are generally age 10 and older, due to the size of the instrument and its strings.

## **Voice Lessons**

Due to 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 vocal technique. It is usually best for vocal students to begin lessons after puberty in order to be the most beneficial.

## **Violin**

We accept violin students from the age of 4. A violin will need to be sized to the student in order to achieve maximum playability. It is somewhat challenging for young ones to press down the strings and learn how to use a bow, but that's exactly what we are here to do!

## **Trumpet**

10 is usually the youngest age for trumpet lessons. Students younger than ten might experience difficulty in holding the trumpet comfortably.

## **Saxophone**

10 is the youngest recommended age for any saxophone student. The size of the student's hand needs to be able to reach all of the keys, which can be a stretch for pinky fingers in particular. The weight of the instrument can sometimes be a little much for younger ones as well.

## **Flute**

Flute students can start as young as six, as long as they use the appropriate sized flute (see below).

Here's a quick summary for the best age to begin lessons:

<b>1 - 3</b>	<b>PNO</b>	<b>GTR.</b>	<b>BASS</b>	<b>VOICE</b>	<b>VLN.</b>	<b>TRPT.</b>	<b>SAX.</b>	<b>FLUTE</b>
N/A	5 +/-	5 +/-	10<	12 +/-	4<	10<	10<	6<

### **3. What Instrument Should I Consider For My Child?**

Having the correct instrument is just as important as starting at the correct age. The following illustrates a few guidelines for each instrument we teach here. If you need any help obtaining a quality instrument, be sure to ask us for help!

#### **Piano vs. Keyboard**

We do not require our piano students to have an acoustic piano in order to begin lessons. If you have an electronic keyboard, that's okay, but it **ABSOLUTELY MUST BE TOUCH SENSITIVE** and **HAVE WEIGHTED KEYS**. Touch sensitive means if you press a key harder, the note will play loud; if you press it softly, the note will play softly. Weighted keys mean the keys have a little weight to them. A good test to determine this: look underneath any given white key. If you can see underneath it, odds

are the keys are not sufficiently weighted (sometimes springs will be added for tension but those aren't too great). Additionally, a keyboard with less than 88 keys can sometimes be confusing for kids to use because "Middle C" (a note heavily stressed in piano lessons, usually for navigational purposes) isn't where it's normally located on 88-keyed instruments. Finally, a keyboard not having full-sized piano keys or no sustain pedal is usually not a quality beginning instrument. Regardless, we usually ask our keyboard-owning piano students to consider purchasing another instrument after a specific time frame (unless it's a high quality keyboard). Otherwise, we have found our students are held back by their inexpensive keyboards, and usually within the first month.

Having an acoustic piano is wonderful for kids to use, as long as it's a quality instrument. Make sure it's tuned to A440 (standard pitch) and is in good playing condition. If you are in the market for a good used piano, consider investing about \$1000.

### **Electric/Acoustic Guitar • Electric/Acoustic Bass**

Guitar and bass students, especially the younger ones, need to purchase an instrument that fits their body size. Half-size and three-quarter size acoustic classical guitars are ideal depending on their size and age. Various options can be considered to obtain a smaller guitar. Rentals are available; for purchasing, consider a \$100-150 investment. A smaller electric bass or guitar, of good quality, is usually harder to find. Acoustic bass is dependent on the size of the individual. Certainly consider having your guitar or bass "set-up" by a professional luthier (guitar maker/repairer) to achieve maximum playability.

### **Violin**

Violin instruments are similar to guitar. Quarter-sized, Half-sized and three-quarter instruments are best for younger ones, and even a sixteenth-size is available. The best way to determine the most suitable size is to visit your local violin shop to have an instrument sized to the student. It is also advised to have a professional luthier set-up the violin.

### **Trumpet**

Any student trumpet free of defects should be adequate for lessons. Bach, Yamaha and King are all quality trumpets for a beginning student.

### **Saxophone**

Information available! Give us a call to learn more.

### **Flute**

Information available! Give us a call to learn more.

## **4. Take Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment with a Quality Instructor**

In order to teach at Knox Music Studios, our teachers are required to either have a music degree or be pursuing a music degree. We do not utilize teachers who have not spent the years of effort and commitment to achieve a well-rounded music education. Nothing bothers us more than Susie Sandpaper and Larry Lackadaisical teaching children and giving them a bad experience! We have teachers that want nothing more than to help sculpt your children in MUSIC!

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 T.V., pets, ringing phones, siblings or anything else. With only 1/2 hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music. 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 side-line for the teacher, but a responsibility which is taken very seriously. Having music lessons that originate from a retail business can be negative as well. Sometimes the lessons are not taken as seriously in such a setting.

All we do here is teach music lessons, and we make sure our lessons are top quality!

## 5. 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 fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

a) **Time** - Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally, if a practice time occurs earlier in the day the child is more likely to stick to it, and the parents won't have to remind them as much.

b) **Repetition** - We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use 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. When a child is younger than 5 they should not practice for longer than 5 minutes a session. Once or twice a day practicing for 5 minutes is much better than 10 straight minutes because of the attention span at this age.

c) **Rewards** - This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a frappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work, and occasionally a lil' bit of sugar. Praise tends to be the most coveted award - there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Sometimes we all have a week with little practicing, in that case there is always next week, so no sweat!

d) **WHEN and HOW TO PRACTICE**- Really try to practice at a good time during the day. Make sure you drink enough water, don't eat sugary treats beforehand, etc. are a few good rules to follow. Also, it's KEY to practice the very next day after your lessons. One's brain retains so much more when information is presented shortly after its first exposure.

Here are two EXCELLENT books to give you some great ideas to help your child with practice:

- 1) **How to get your Child to Practice ...Without Resorting to Violence!!** by Richards, Cynthia
- 2) **Helping Parents Practice: Ideas for Making It Easier** by Sprunger, Edmond

## 6. Use Recognized Teaching Materials

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example, in piano there are books for very young beginners, and books for adult students who have never played before. The books available can start anyone at any level. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier, ensuring that no important part of learning an instrument can inadvertently be excluded

. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher left off. Please ask what methods are used by our teachers.

### Have Fun!!

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. 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. Always keep your focus on the long-term goal and most importantly have fun!