

Five Ways To Get The Most Out Of Music Lessons

These guidelines will help you to have a successful, rewarding learning experience.

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

Adults can start music lessons at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing. It is not uncommon to have a beginner student in their 60's or 70's.

For children, starting at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons. Some people will tell you, "the sooner the better" but this attitude can actually backfire and be negative. If a child is put into lessons too soon they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off music just because they had one unpleasant experience which could have been prevented. Sometimes if the child waits a year to start lessons their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start music lessons.

4-6 Years Old

If a preschooler has a desire and wants to start music, a group music class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful later in private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work as the child has not yet experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or school and learns more effectively through the game oriented pre-school method.

Piano Lessons

At our school 5 years old is the youngest age that we start children in private lessons. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.

Voice and Guitar Lessons

8 years old is recommended as the youngest for private vocal and guitar 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. For children younger than 8 we recommend our group music class or starting with piano lessons.

2. TAKE LESSONS IN A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on education. In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by TV, pets, ringing phones, siblings, etc. With only 1/2 to one 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 more motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to other musical instruments. In a school, the lessons are not just a hobby or sideline of the teacher, but a responsibility which is taken very seriously.

3. MAKE PRACTICING EASIER

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lesson is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

Time

Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children

Repetition

We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a younger 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.

Rewards

This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them occasional rewards for successful practicing. 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.

4. 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 that have never played before. There are books that can start you at a level you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. 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.

5. MOST IMPORTANTLY...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.