

21 TIPS for keeping your students and children engaged with MUSIC

FOR PARENTS

INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE – Whenever possible, let your children play the instrument they show the most interest in. We have all heard the story that “Mom made me take piano lessons and I hated it”. If we truly want our child to enjoy music making, we should introduce them to several instruments, offer some suggestions and then take a step back let them make a choice. If cost is a concern, consider offering your child two or three choices that will fit within your budget.

TEACHER/MENTOR – We recommend you meet with a few different music teachers, talk to some of their students and then try to gauge who might be a good fit for teaching your child. You and your child will both be more drawn to certain personalities and teaching styles. Don’t be afraid to change-up teachers after a while if your child seems to be losing interest. The phrase “different strokes for different folks” truly applies here.

PRACTICE – Instead of forcing a practice schedule on your child, ask them how often they think they should practice to achieve their goal of playing the songs or musical pieces they want to learn.

PASSION - Help your children develop a love for music by taking them to concerts, local music shows and other events that feature live music. Introduce them to some of your favorite music from your youth. Our daughter has absolutely latched onto some of my favorite classic rock hits and I couldn’t be happier.

BE CREATIVE – Especially with young children, this is our opportunity as parents to help mold their future. Play musical games with your child, sing together, go to a music store and play around with different instruments. Seek out local musical instrument petting zoos – these events are like a Musical Show & Tell combined with a Please Touch Museum.

For PARENTS & MUSIC TEACHERS

CELEBRATE – As parents, we can celebrate our child’s progress with a special treat, dinner out or even offer to do their daily chore one day as a reward. For teachers, you can celebrate your student’s successes with Student of the Month awards, weekly online spotlights (with parent’s permission) and post-Recital parties.

PLATEAUS - Teach your children that its very common for musicians to sometimes be stuck in a place where they don’t seem to be improving. Let them know that this is absolutely normal and to be expected...with consistent practice they will break through that plateau and all of a sudden it will feel like their playing magically improved.

ROCK BAND – As students enter their teen years, consider letting them join the band program if your music school offers that. If that’s not available ask your music school if they are considering starting a band program. Another option is to have your child invite their friends over for jam sessions in your basement, garage or living room (YIKES!).

PARTICIPATION – Consider taking lessons with your child so you can enjoy the musical journey together. At a minimum, parents of younger children (under 7) should attend their child’s lesson so you can learn enough to help when they become stuck.

21 TIPS for keeping your students and children engaged with MUSIC

For MUSIC TEACHERS

PERFORMANCES – Plan two or three performance or recital opportunities throughout the year. This gives students a goal to work towards and parents an opportunity to cheer their child on. Performances also offer students an opportunity to “show off” their talents and be proud of their accomplishments. It also allows parents to see the community you are building with your music teaching practice.

POSITIVE ATTITUDE – As a teacher, sometimes it’s hard not to get stuck in a rut and begin to lose your initial enthusiasm for teaching. We all have our up days and down days, but it’s important to maintain an upbeat attitude with your students. They will feed off whatever energy the teacher is putting out and that will contribute to how they perceive the lesson experience and their overall view on playing their instrument. As one of our “88 Ways Music” contributors said, “I Teach People, Not Pianos”. We may think we are teaching a child how to play piano, guitar or some other instrument, but in reality we are given the privilege of mentoring them in ways we never imagined when we first decided to teach music.

TECHNOLOGY – Trying to find a student 10 years or older without their own cell phone is like trying to go back in time. Often times, kids are hooked on technology at an even younger age. Where possible, try to find ways to incorporate technology into your teaching methods. You may find your students become more motivated to practice and become more engaged with their instrument and lessons. Examples include Garage Band, Youtube, Note Trainer and Musical U.

GAMES – For younger students, you definitely want to try to make the lessons and learning fun, especially when introducing theory concepts. The Making Music Fun website offers a number of fun ideas and suggestions: https://makingmusicfun.net/html/mmf_music_library_private_teacher.php. If you are a classroom music teacher for young children, NAFME offers some suggestions on their website: <https://nafme.org/classroom-games-and-activities-for-general-music/>

SELECTION – When possible, try to incorporate some music selections that the student is familiar with. If you are teaching classical music, this may be more of a challenge. If the parents are insisting their child learn classical pieces, try offering a compromise which allows the student to mix in a popular song after one or two classical pieces. This will keep the student more engaged in their musical journey because their learning has become expanded. Expose your student to classically trained musicians and artists in all styles of music who incorporate classical instruments and styles in their music.

GOALS & MILESTONES – Give your students goals to work towards with a specific date in mind. As you and your student get more comfortable together, allow them to participate in selecting the goal and when they believe they will achieve it. This will help teach them the power of setting goals and inspire them to spend more time practicing. When students begin to learn they can become masters of their own destiny, a whole world of possibilities opens up for them.

RECORD - Record parts of your lessons and make it available for the student and parents to listen back to. As much as we sometimes hate hearing ourselves on tape (I’m dating myself on this one), we all know that the one of the best ways to improve is to listen back to our performances. You will inevitably capture some magical takes that you and the student will be extremely proud of. You will also capture snippets of teachable moments that will help in the learning process. Encourage the students to make own recordings at home and to listen back and learn from what they hear. Students may initially be nervous at the idea of having their playing recorded, however let them know that after a few weeks of recording themselves they’ll start to forget all about the recording when they’re playing.

21 TIPS for keeping your students and children engaged with MUSIC

For MUSIC TEACHERS (continued)

LISTEN – Keep your eyes and ears open to what else is happening in the student’s world. Events happening at home or school may make the student seem more distracted and less engaged. Don’t hesitate to change up the regular lesson routine to give them a break or a chance to try something new. We all have high and low points in our lives and your students are no different. If your student appears tired, have them stand up, stretch for a minute and maybe says “1, 2, 3 WHOOOSH while throwing their hands up in the air” (thanks to our mentor Jack Canfield for that one)

PACING – Similar to “listening” above, try to pace your expectations with each student individually as well as differently over time. If we’re teaching a student long term, we may get used to them picking up on things quickly, learning new musical selections in a flash but then be disappointed when that doesn’t happen. Like us, students all go through different phases and we may need to lighten up the learning load from time to time. Also try to recognize when they appear to be voracious learners and we can’t seem to keep up with challenging them enough. Take a step back in between lessons and devise a few new ideas and concepts that you can introduce them to over the next several lessons.

BALANCE – Try to strike a balance between reviewing familiar material and learning something new. If a student is having a particularly difficult time with one piece, allow them to put it aside for a week but with a commitment of coming back to it. Try breaking up the piece into sections and having them work on mastering one section at a time, gradually building up their confidence with each conquered section.

INTERACTIVE – Try to make lessons interactive by asking your students questions about their musical tastes, favorite songs and artists. Conversely, share details of your own musical tastes and journey that brought you into teaching.

PERSONALITY – Finally...Let your personality and love for music shine through. Your students will reflect that energy and enthusiasm back to you as they begin to feed off it. Instead of dreading an upcoming lesson, we all want our students to look forward to it. Your energy, personality and FUN level will have a lot to do with that.



For more information on **Teach Music Week** and **Kids Music Day**, please visit www.KeepMusicAlive.org

For more information on the “88+ Ways Music Can Change Your Life” book series, please visit www.88WaysMusic.com or search “88 Ways Music” on Amazon and Barnes & Noble.