

How to support your child learn a musical instrument



You have a budding little Mozart who is wanting to learn the piano. Or your child comes home from school with a trumpet. So once you have found them a good teacher, what else can you do to support your child's new interest, apart from paying the teacher. Also learning an instrument can be expensive. Paying for the instrument, paying for a teacher, and then paying for any books and accessories they made need, so how do you make sure you get your money's worth?

The answer is the child will need to practice in-between their lessons. How do you support your child to practice?

A five-year-old, just starting on their musical journey, will need a lot more parental involvement, then a 16-year old who has been studying music for ten years.

The amount and role of parental involvement will change as the child gets older.

But there are four keys roles that a parent plays and one vital skill that parents require to support their child on their musical journey.



The Personal Assistant

You will need to help your child find the time in their day to practice. Regular, consistent practice during the week is the best way to see progress in your child's musical learning.

You also need to make sure they get to their lessons, concerts, workshops and make sure they are paid in time.

You also need to make sure that their instrument is in good working order for them to practice. If necessary to get it serviced yearly. There is nothing worse than playing an instrument that is not in good working order.

It would help if you also made sure the child has a place to practice which also well lit, not going to disturb the rest of the house too much, but also you don't want to feel cut off from the family. This can be a tricky balance in a small house.



The Cheerleader

You need to be your child's biggest fan. Even if you are not a musician, you should be able to hear small improvements in their playing. If you do, tell them. Even if you don't hear them make any improvements in their practice, praise them for practising and persevering with it and not giving up. Practising an instrument can be challenging and frustrating work at times.

Remember, you are not their teacher. Teaching methods have changed in the last twenty years.

The Liaison Officer

Talk to your child's instrumental teacher. Find out their approach to teaching. If you learnt music as a child, your child's teacher might be using a different method of how you were taught.

For example, you have been taught note names on the stave by the use of mnemonic (Every Good Boy Deserves Football). But your child's teacher may teach notes using an intervallic method. Find out about how they teach, and so you can support your teacher teach your child.

If your child is struggling with something, then you need to tell the teacher. Sometimes children may not have the confidence in telling their teacher they are finding something hard, or they don't understand something. It's not always a negative reflection of the teacher; the child may want to please them. A good teacher may pick up that a child is struggling in an area, and can adjust their teaching accordingly. Still, it may help them get there quicker if you have good communication with your child's teacher.

The Negotiator

Like I have said already, learning an instrument is hard work and takes a lot of discipline. Which makes it all the more rewarding when you feel like you achieved something in music.

It takes time for a child and a teenager to develop their time management skills. You have to assist organising their day and week to find regular time to practice, in amongst everything else that they do.

There will be times when your child will refuse to practice and will have missed practising for several days. The longer you leave in between practising, the harder it will be when you get back into it. There have been times in my life where I have disliked and struggled with practising. You need to encourage your child to practice, but please don't make their instrument become a battleground. You don't want their instrumental practise even more of a negative experience

There will be times when learning their instrument will feel like even more hard work. This usually is when technical challenges increase. For example, when learning the piano going from playing only one hand at a time to both hands together requires a lot more concentration and physical coordination to the beginning. It would help if you encouraged your child to persevere through this challenging period.

If their reluctance to practice their instrument continues over a period of weeks, then please chat with their teacher about it. They may not realise the child is struggling may find alternative music to get your child excited to play their instrument again. Chat to your child to find out what they don't like about practising.

You will need a lot of patience!

Practising music is not a performance. Good practice will involve doing lots of technical exercises. You will hear the same sections of music repeated over and over again. You will hear strange sounds, that don't sound particularly musical, this should be a normal part of practice if you are in doubt in how they are practising chat with their teacher. There will also be moments of silence, where your child should be thinking about what they did, reading the scores, working out what they should do next, or to making notes.

You shouldn't hear the playing of a piece all the way through all the time unless there is a performance coming up soon.



While learning an instrument requires hard work, it is rewarding. It teaches children much more than being able to play their instrument. However, don't let the discipline of learning to play an instrument get in the way of the joy of making music.



Journey Into Music is a great place to help your child start their musical adventure. Whether they are already learning an instrument or just waiting to start. In this short course, your child will explore the concepts of beat, rhythm and pitch. They will also be able to recognise rhythms symbols which will help them with reading music.

To find out more please visit
www.rachaelinwoodmusic.co.uk/journeyintomusic

Rachael Inwood is a community musician. She teaches piano, flute, musicianship and theory as well as this she runs music workshops for people with learning disabilities. She is also a songwriter.

