



## **How to Find the Right Music Teacher for Your Child**

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Children are fascinated by the sounds of musical instruments and many would like to learn to play one. Some parents, especially those who have never played an instrument, do not know how to begin finding a teacher. There are too many music studios, schools, and private instructors who teach from their home or even come to students' homes.

I have been in music education for over 40 years. It has been my great pleasure to work with piano students, many of whom studied with me from a young age until they graduated. But recently, I found myself on the other side, as a grandmother trying to find the right teacher for my grandchildren.

My grandkids lived three hours away from me and from the music school that I started in 1991 (the Gorin School of Music), so I had to find a teacher in their area, outside of my school. I would like to share my thoughts and experiences in this regard, in the hope that it may be helpful in your search for the right music teacher.

First of all, it is important to assess your child's capability (of course, to the best of your knowledge): to observe his/her attention span, to determine his/her musical interest, and to determine the teaching method (for example, a slow pace or more intense study), which would most likely be compatible with your child's personality. All these factors will influence how your child develops a deeper appreciation for music, and especially, the skills in learning the instrument.

It is also very important to clear a misconception that any teacher (whether it is a professional or someone who just plays the instrument) can teach a beginning student, and that a more qualified teacher is only needed later if the student becomes serious about the music study. In fact, the beginning is extremely important. I like to compare the beginning of the music study to building the foundation of a building. In both cases, if you don't lay proper foundation, there is a high price to pay in rebuilding or retraining.

What do parents need to know about the teacher and his or her teaching methods? In answering this question, I would like to use an example of my three and a half year old granddaughter. She began attending music lessons (Kindermusic, group lessons) when she was 18 months old. When she reached three and a half, she asked for individual piano lessons. I called the local Music Teachers' Association and got the phone numbers of a few local piano teachers. In my calls to the teachers I asked how much experience they had teaching this age group and what the content and structure of the lessons was. My selection of the teacher was based on a few points that I knew were important from my own teaching experience: that teacher paid close attention to the student's posture and hand position, and that the teacher's personality was warm and nurturing to assure that the piano lessons would have a positive effect on my granddaughter.



Periodically, I attended my granddaughter's lessons and was pleased to see that the lessons were having a positive effect on her attitude toward music. However, I did not see a sufficient focus on playing the instrument in these lessons: in the first year of her study with this teacher, my granddaughter did not learn a single song to perform. In contrast, my students (as well as all students at GSM) can perform after three months of study. Even though these may be very simple pieces, the children play them from memory and with musicality.

This experience was not only disappointing for me, but it was also hazardous for the child's musical future: she was clearly bored and losing interest. My next step was to do more research through the Music Teachers' Association, making calls once more to teacher candidates. This time my questions were focused on the importance of posture, hand position, and how much is playing a part of the lesson. I also asked how they would be building up technique and repertoire in a motivational and nurturing way.

As you can see, at this point, it was necessary for me to change the teacher. Although at GSM, we take all these points in consideration as a matter of course, in the private sector, parents need to take the initiative to make sure that their child's teacher has proper qualifications, appropriately structures the lessons, and is consistent and well-organized in their teaching. Evaluations and recitals are a way of providing accountability for the student and the teacher. Therefore, these evaluations and recitals, which can be done in a lighthearted and friendly way to limit performance anxiety, have to be a part of the learning process. If they are absent from a teacher's curriculum, the child is missing a critical element of the learning process.

What I learned from this personal experience is that the careful selection of an appropriate teacher and the method of study that is consonant with your child's personality will positively influence the child's development. That method should include training in the skills of performing and the joy of sharing music with others. It is a good practice to use referrals from friends, but it is still important to do your own research, as well. I wish you all the best in your quest to finding the best possible program for your child.