



How to Optimize Your Child's Daily Music Practice Sessions at Home

By Rufina Gorin, MA, NCMT

It is quite difficult even to imagine that children can learn to play an instrument without help at home. I do understand that in many cases both parents are working, perhaps even running their own businesses, which does not leave them much free time. But try to allocate a little time in your daily schedule to help your child with piano practice, and you will see that it will greatly pay off. In some cases, you may have to fully supervise your child's practice time. In other cases, you may only need to check a specific song or specific exercise. This will take only a few minutes. With older, intermediate level students, you could encourage them to play some music after dinner. This will give you a chance to encourage your child to perform, to see the evidence of your child's progress, and to praise his or her accomplishments.

I am often asked: "How can I help in practicing if I do not play an instrument?" The answer is that you do not have to play an instrument in order to help your child. The help I am talking about refers to following the teacher's specific suggestions or home assignments. If you attend the lessons, you will be able to remind your child of important points to be worked on: posture, hand position, special focus on technique, and so on. If you do not have a chance to be present at the lesson, then by periodically talking to the teacher, you will find out how you can help with specific things during the practice time. This kind of help is important and can make a tremendous difference in learning, in the level of progress, and in your child's motivation. Most importantly, it can give you a chance to share in your child's musical interest.

Let's take the example of a very young beginner, age 4-7. It is not only the age factor we need to consider in selecting the proper assistance for him or her, but also the child's personality. Some children are more independent than others, regardless of their age. Also we need to consider the differences in children's moods. As a parent you need to take all these points into consideration as well as to discuss better ways to assist at home with your child's teacher.

In regard to the older beginners, ages 8-13, you may ask: "Can't they practice on their own?" Of course they can, but it will be more productive, less stressful, and will take less time for them to learn a skill or a song with your help at home. Time involvement can vary with younger kids, which was discussed earlier. I would like to point out that kids are so individual that the age group category is not always the sole guiding factor; thus, you need to be more in tune with your child's personality rather than age.

In this age group, 8-13, apart from accurate assessment of proper help at home, your encouragement becomes a significant factor. Kids of these ages are more sensitive to criticism than younger ones. Your role is not to become their principal teacher, but just to be a supportive parent who demonstrates appreciation of your child's efforts. Parents with more than one child



need to be especially careful about comparing their progress. Every child has unique qualities, unique talents and personality, and definitely their own individual pace of musical development and learning. All children blossom musically at different times, because they reach emotional maturity at different times, as well. Please be patient and allow them to blossom in their own time, but remember that they can't do it without your support and encouragement.

It would be an excellent practice to incorporate listening to CDs, classical stations on the radio, and TV broadcasts of great performances, and attending live performances into the family time together. This will help your child connect the piano lessons and actual performing arts so that he or she can more fully understand music and performance, as well as appreciate it.

Let me add a few words about the four basic temperaments. The ancient Greeks recognized four basic temperaments: Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic and Phlegmatic. These temperaments expressed the moods that people felt. These temperaments (or moods) were thought to be the result of the physical condition of one's bodily fluids. (There is much confusion because Western medicine has interpreted "temperament" to mean personality rather than mood). Nonetheless, the Greeks believed that everyone had different moods or temperaments and that each was associated with different characteristics:

- *Sanguine*: sociable, talkative, easy going, leadership, carefree
- *Choleric*: touchy, aggressive, excitable, impulsive
- *Melancholic*: moody, rigid, pessimistic, unsociable, quiet
- *Phlegmatic*: passive, careful, thoughtful, peaceful, controlled

Although not particularly scientific, in contemporary times, these categories are still used by some groups, such as the Waldorf School, to help teachers and parents characterize the differences among children. Perhaps you will find them useful, as well.

To conclude, there are many ways you can help your children with their practice at home, and I have seen the impact that such parental involvement can have. I am amazed by the efforts of many parents at GSM that I have the pleasure to know. They are very supportive of their kids and the work of the teachers. Their help at home makes a huge difference.

If you have any specific questions on this topic, please e-mail me your concerns, and I will be happy to address them in future articles.