

I Love to Practice! by [Joanne Bath](#)

"I love to practice!" That's what we all want our children to say. Here are some ideas for how parents can get there without resorting to things they wish they hadn't! These suggestions can keep you motivated so that you can help your children have the best possible musical experience.



Enjoy the process. If you can figure out how to have pleasant practice sessions, you and your children will succeed. This may be the hardest part of the whole process, and perhaps the most crucial. Suzuki said that little children should "practice three minutes, five times a day, with joy." The main goal for practice should be with joy.

Be consistent. If your child knows that you will practice every day at the same time, it is easier for you and more secure for your child. Find a time that works best for your family. If you can, practice for ten or fifteen minutes before school.

Don't negotiate. If you practice only when your child feels like it, you will probably never practice. Get in the habit of regular practice and do it. Say, "Practicing is what we do in our family." I have found that "in our family" is one of the greatest phrases you can use. If children believe that something is done in their family, they will do it!

Be reasonable—don't expect perfection. One of the parent's most important jobs is to show children that life is not a matter of being perfect, but one of trying new things and growing. We do not want children to be overly cautious about learning. We want them to be interested in a variety of things, and willing to accept a challenge.

Work for an accomplishment rather than a set amount of time. One of the best ways you can teach your children to be efficient workers is to stop early when they have accomplished the goals for a practice session. If students can learn to reach their goals in less time, they learn efficiency.

Do not ask for too much. If you stop the practice session before the child is ready to stop, the child will want to play again the next day. Suzuki said, "Move slowly and never stop."

Gradually lengthen practice time. Children need to slowly gain physical stamina. They will also have more repertoire as time progresses, and practicing will automatically get longer as they review. Some of my students review a whole book each day.

Focus on quality rather than quantity. Small manage-able sections can be worked out with a feeling of success. Do one measure thoroughly so the child can really master it. More is not always better. It is better to play fewer pieces and play them well, so move slowly and carefully.

Move at your child's pace. Compare only so you have a general idea of what others are doing. Allow your child to move at a pace that is natural for her.

Know what you are doing. You are the home teacher. To learn what you should be doing at home with your child, ask the teacher. Take notes or tape the lesson.

Be in charge. The secret to successful practicing is that the parent must be in charge to a greater or lesser degree depending on the child's age.

Focus on what is right. Tell children what they are doing well. Parents often ask if they can help their children successfully if they are not musicians them-selves. Actually, non-musician parents often have a much easier time than musician parents. Musicians are trained to find mistakes so that they can correct them, while people who are not musicians tend to hear the music and not the mistakes.

Stay positive. Be of good cheer. Avoid statements like, "You're not even trying," "That's terrible," or, "You're just trying to irritate me!" If you feel something hurtful coming, put your hand over your mouth. Do not say something that could destroy weeks of positive growth.

Remember the power of praise. Praise always accomplishes more than criticism. Sometimes it is not just praise but acknowledgment. Acknowledge what the child is doing. Keep a running list of all the wonderful things that your child does. If your child is just starting to read, make the list in large print so the child can read for himself all the things that he did well.

Give rewards. From the beginning, try to establish the desire and pattern of practice. You don't have to always give rewards, but if you do at certain times, you'll find that you will get good work from your child. Austin, our six-year-old grandson, will work hard for shiny pennies, which we call "gold coins." I sometimes give him one for everything he does well in a practice session.

Consider listening part of practicing. Listening makes the practicing and learning easy. Put your child to bed every night with a tape of the next piece. He will be able to learn the notes to that piece very rapidly, and all you will have to do is show him the bowings. If you are in a time crunch, and simply can't practice one day, listen. If

you have to choose between practicing and listening, listen. If you go on a camping trip and you can't take the violin, take the tape player and listen.

Give projects and assignments. Deadlines and performances are very motivational. A performance could be just making a video or audio tape for the grandparents, or playing over the telephone. Get children to play as much as they possibly can.

Review every day. Most of my students have a review chart. When they are more advanced, they may do three pieces from each book or they may do one book a day. The students at the end of Book 2 should play all of the pieces in Book 2 every day. This may mean two practice sessions. If your child is in Book 1, he should be practicing all of the pieces in Book 1 every day.

Play review games. Children love "Lucky Dip." Write cards with the names of all the pieces that the children play and put them in a box. The children draw the name of a piece of music from the box, and play the piece. Or have your child play along with the CD.

Divide practice sessions in approximate thirds: one-third review, one-third preview, and one-third polishing. Polishing means working on the last three pieces and getting those so that they are performance ready.

Help older children find time to practice. One of the best things you can do is to excuse your teenager from some household tasks in exchange for practicing. Make it easy for them.

This is a very special time that you have with your children. You have your child one-on-one during practice. Sometimes that is the only time that a parent and child have alone together. Treasure your children and their accomplishments. Be understanding, encouraging and loving and I promise you that you will have success beyond anything you could have ever imagined!

Excerpted from a talk given to parents of the Greenville Suzuki Association, November 1999.