

DO'S AND DON'TS FOR PARENTS

Do's

- At the outset of lessons make clear to your child, in an enthusiastic manner, that music training is a long-term process, just like school, but with many high points of pleasure along the way.
- Your child has his own unique pace, so avoid comparing him to siblings or neighbors' children who may appear to be playing better than he. Anticipate ups and downs in his attitude and progress, along with a number of "growing pain" periods.
- Seriously contemplate how to help your child. Knowing when to help, when to be supportive, and when to withdraw to encourage him to help himself is a parental art in itself.
- Stress that quality, not quantity, of practice is what results in real progress.
- "Music comes to the child more naturally, when there is music in his mother's speaking voice," said violin educator Shinichi Suzuki. So be pleasant and encouraging about your child's practicing. Naturally, there will be occasions when you will need to be firm. But remember with "music in your voice," coach him, guide him, but don't police him.
- When you help your child, be at his side—not at the other end of the room or in the next room. Teach him to treat the practice session with the same respect he gives to his lesson period.
- During a crisis, always talk it out with your child in an atmosphere of mutual respect. If the issue is serious, you may need to discuss it with the teacher first. Allow your child to participate in the final decision so he feels that his voice has been heard. Teach him to interact constructively in group decision making.
- A sense of humor is a powerful tool with which to resolve disagreements about practicing.
- Always let your child feel you are proud of his achievements, even when they are small.

Don'ts

- Never belittle your child's efforts.
- Don't despair at temporary lapses in practice. Your child will make progress in the lesson itself, although less rapidly.
- Don't threaten to stop his lessons if he doesn't practice. Threats can work during periods of high motivation in music but may boomerang during a "growing pain" period. The day may come when he will remind you of your threat and insist that you make good on it.
- Don't criticize your child in the presence of others, especially the teacher. The teacher has skillfully built up a good relationship with your child, and his loss of face will tend to undermine it. Speak to the teacher, and only the teacher, privately about problems.
- Your financial investment in your child's music lessons pays its dividends through the skills he acquires over the years, not by the amount of his daily practice, nor in how much he plays for you or your guests. Remember you are giving your child a music education for his artistic use, for his self-expression, and for his pleasure. Don't expect him as a child to be grateful for your sacrifices. His gratitude will come years later when he can play and enjoy music as an adult.