

How to Help Your Young Child Develop Effective Practice Habits

- Effective, daily practice is crucial for your child to make progress. Children aren't born with practice skills, nor are they developed overnight. Excellent practice skills take years to develop and must be taught. Parental involvement is necessary for children 10 years and younger, especially in the first few years of study. These are a few ideas you can use to help you child develop practice skills.
- Choose the same time of day for practice, a time when your child has the most energy and focus. Try practicing first thing in the morning after breakfast, and either right before or after dinner. Practice has to become as habitual as brushing your teeth or getting out of bed.
- Make daily practice a priority, an appointment that cannot be broken.
- Avoid distractions such as television, pets, visitors, phones, or interruptions for chores.
- Provide an environment with enough lighting and a well-tuned instrument. An acoustic piano should be tuned twice a year in order to keep it in tune.
- As a general guideline, a student should practice everyday at minimum, the length of the weekly lesson. For a student taking a 45-minute lesson, daily practice of 45 minutes a day is encouraged. A student taking a 30-minute lesson should practice 30 minutes a day. Allow your young child to practice in short sessions, 10-15 minutes at a time, 2-3 times a day. This is just a guideline, not an absolute amount.
- Plan each practice session with your child – Decide which pieces you are going to work on and what problems you would like to solve. Start each practice session with a different piece so that all pieces are practiced during the week. Supervise your child's practice sessions. Check proper seating and foot position before and during playing. Very young students need to use a foot stool or pedal extender. Sit next to your child and make sure he practices each piece that is assigned during at least 3 practice sessions during the week. It is not absolutely necessary to practice every piece every day. The assignments are written weekly in the practice book that I give each student. Reviewing this regularly will serve as a guide to weekly practice and learning. If you can't sit with your child during a practice session, try to be in the room to listen attentively. Sometimes your presence is all a child needs.
- Gently remind your child to practice every day if needed. Stress the importance of daily practice. Just like soccer, baseball or any other kind sport, you must practice the piano to improve. Playing an instrument involves fine motor skills that aren't required in other activities, so daily practice is essential. If your child wants improve as a pianist, then he or she must practice regularly.
- Encourage your child when he practices consistently.
- Provide performance opportunities for your child. Have friends, relatives or family members listen to him. Or, line up his favorite stuffed animals as an audience.
- Ask your child to teach you. There is no better way to enforce a concept than to teach it to someone else.
- The following things do not work: Yelling at your child, using practice as punishment, comparing your child's progress to someone else's, criticizing your child without also praising his strengths.
- As a student becomes more advanced, more practice time is required. Consistent, focused practice is the key to progress.