

Thoughts on practicing from Gabe Kitayama-Bolkosky

HOME PRACTICE

Practice is a complex topic. Our approach involves what might be described with two names- feather on a glass and training the monkey mind. Because the nature of the mind is restless, it takes a long time for sitting still to be fun. So, when the mind wanders, if we pull it back with too much force, we create little traumas in the learning process that create more stress around the process and less benefit. Therefore, it's important to understand the nature of a lifelong practice vs. simply trying to play well.

If your child is practicing from a place of fear, anger, or worry, negative emotions, then their relationship with the instrument will be rooted in those emotions. We strongly encourage parents to think about how they address the child if they are distracted, tired and don't want to practice. Learn to recognize their edge and not constantly push them past it. As with any practice, understanding your edge is the key to longevity in that practice.

For ages 3-6, we recommend a predetermined time when you know your kid is not going to feel tired. Practice with a very light touch. There should be lots of playing, hugs and saying things like, "You did it!" Allow their mind to wander and then find a practice for yourself to gently bring them back without frustrating them. Children between the age of 3-6 don't have the capacity to understand quality. To expect quality from them, focuses them on things that are not relevant to them and can be deeply detrimental.

For ages 7-10, we recommend a predetermined time that you decide with your child. This is the age where concrete thinking starts to happen in the mind and frustration starts to develop. Frustration is a normal part of the process. Now, not only do you love everything they do, you notice their process and help them use tools to process their frustration. This is a time to gently help them through thoughts and feelings.

For ages 11-14, we recommend less involvement. Together, you can set practice times but you should not interfere with what happens during that time. There is too much going on in their head to expect them to be able to focus like they did when they were younger. Adolescence is a hard time. They get more angry if you make them feel self conscious. At this stage, there should be a development of what kind of music they like to listen to. Encourage them to find and listen to music they like, classical and non-classical.

For ages 15-18, we recommend you help with time management. Most discussions about violin should be led by your kid. Follow their interest without judgement. If their desires have been carefully supported up until now, a proper discipline will form.