

The Parent's Guide to Practicing

Excerpted from "A Parent's Guide For The Young Musician's Practice Experience"
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Many parents have asked themselves, "I want to help my child with practicing but I don't know anything about music and I wasn't in band. How can I help?"

The following information can assist you in keeping your child both successful and accountable when practicing the instrument at home. These steps will also show the child that their parents care about their musical education, that practicing is not a pain or burden to others, and that this investment of time and preparation to ensure the child's success will mean a lot to the child in the long run.

The Environment of Practice

Relaxed and quiet: Similar to studying any other academic subject, practicing an instrument is a mental process. The practice environment should be as similar to a library as possible, except that your child can make lots of good sounds here.

Correct temperature: The temperature range of 70 to 75 degrees is needed for the wind instrument to have the best chance to play in tune. While it is understandable why parents might want to send students to practice in the garage to avoid disturbing other people in the house, it is not in the best interest of the child's opportunity for success. Abnormal temperatures can adversely impact the performance of their instrument, could possibly damage the instrument, and can cause the child to dislike practicing.

Sturdy chair and music stand: It is vital that the child's practice space allow them to sit or stand in the same position they do in band class. A sturdy chair is important to help them sit in the correct posture. The child should never have to bend over to read their music, and a practice stand will allow the student to view their music exactly as they do in band class.

The Sounds of Practice

Essential sounds: Students should be working on their sound with just the mouthpiece, mouthpiece and barrel, or head joint. This sound might be slightly irritating, but it is crucial to their development of correct embouchure and tone quality. They should work for a steady sound that does not waver.

Long tones: The first sounds a student should make on their assembled instrument should be long and smooth tones. Their tone quality is one of the most important aspects of learning their instrument during the early years. Again, they should work for a steady sound that does not waver.

Note-naming: Students should be saying the note names out loud while reading the staff lines of our music. Ultimately, this should be done while fingering or positioning the notes being spoken.

Counting and clapping: Counting out rhythms (like learning to read words) and then combining those rhythms with steady tempo will help your child develop motor skills and learn the concept of simultaneous responsibilities.

What you should NOT hear: Students sometimes become inquisitive about their instrument and try to make "unique" sounds as a result. They should never make deliberately poor sounds on their instrument or attempt to play extremely high or fast notes.

Parent Practice

Healthy environment: Make sure they are practicing in a comfortable place as described above. Do not allow siblings to distract your child during practice. Also, please do not send them away or outside to practice. Practice should not become a negative experience for your child.

Scheduled times: Create a regular practice time for your child (preferably when you are home to hear him/her practice). When the habit of practicing at the same time every day occurs, your child's practice routine will solidify.

Home performance: Schedule a time every few days for your child to perform music for your family or friends. Encourage them to perform music or other concepts that they are playing in class. This will allow them to have performance goals outside of class.

Ask questions: Have your child explain what his or her plan is for their practice session. Ask them about assigned homework or other class assignments such as warm-ups. Also, this is an opportunity for the child to teach the parent, which will make your child feel like a million bucks!

Observe your child: From time to time, listen to your child practice. Ask them to explain the process that they go through for each part of their practice session. Have them play the assigned material for you with this guide in front of you as a reference.

The quality of daily home practice time directly impacts students' playing level on their instruments.
Thank you for supporting your child's musical goals!