

What Every Parent Should Know Before Choosing Music Lessons

These guidelines will help your child have a successful, rewarding experience learning music. These are practical tips that we have discovered from years of teaching experience with hundreds of students.

Age – Appropriate Music Instruction for Young Children

For children, we know that music is one of the first and most important modes of communication. Research has shown that music enhances memory, language, reasoning, spatial-relations, logic, perception, social interaction and math skills. When children participate in music they are developing skills that will apply to math, to language, to literacy, and to life itself.

While music instruction can be introduced at a young age, even before language skills have developed, that doesn't mean you should sign your 3 year old up for piano lessons, or rush out and begin violin with your 4 year old. Music instruction must be developmentally appropriate to have the best impact and most enjoyment for you and your child. Our goal is to develop a life-long love of music!

Kindermusik (16 months – 4 ½ years old) more than any other program for toddlers and preschoolers provides a thorough foundation for future musical opportunities. As the world's most respected name in early childhood musical learning, Kindermusik has been enriching lives with the most carefully researched, developmentally based music program available. Toddlers and Preschoolers can experience the magic of music without the pressure to perform—just the encouragement and guidance to stretch their boundaries with creativity and fun! Each Kindermusik class is a world of discovery and adventure. In every class you'll witness your child's developmental evolution in language skills, literacy, listening, problem solving, social skills, self-esteem and musicality. And it all happens within a nurturing environment—full of energy, imagination, music, dancing, and playful delight. Kindermusik's *At Home Materials* provide parents with age-appropriate songs and activities that will give their children musical confidence at home too!

Piano & Guitar Prep At ages 4 ½ -6 ½, Our “*MUSIC for the YOUNG CHILD*” graduates leave the program reading notes and rhythm, playing their melodies on the glockenspiel, dulcimer and recorder, knowing all the instruments of the orchestra and which instrument they would like to play. They jump into our instrument/voice studies full of enthusiasm and an ability to feel and express the music with their whole being. These children will be musicians for a lifetime!

Instrument and Voice Lessons

1. How Young Is Too Young – Starting at the Right Age

- **The right program at the right time.** For instrument or voice lessons, some people will tell you “the sooner the better” but this attitude can backfire. If a child is put into private music lessons too soon (too young, shorter attention span, not ready for the necessary physical coordination, etc.) they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons not long after they have started. The last thing you want to do is turn child off music because they had one unpleasant experience that could have been prevented.
- **Music makes a child smarter.** For children, research has proven that early integration of music into a child's daily routine vastly improves his ability to think, reason, create and express.

We have found the following guidelines to be successful in determining which program provides the best results. An age-appropriate curriculum is key to music lesson success.

Piano, Violin & Guitar

- **At age 6, children have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.** At our school 6 years old is the youngest age we start children in piano lessons.
- **Piano playing involves complex physical and intellectual skills** all happening simultaneously. At age 6, children are coordinated enough to begin using both hands and all 10 fingers to execute these skills. They are also ready for more advanced music reading skills.

Voice

- **For younger children aged 5-10 we recommend our Children's Choirs,** teaching young singers how to use their voices properly and safely in a fun, relaxed environment. The choir opportunity also focuses on note-reading, ear-training skills and harmony.
- **10 years old is the recommended youngest age for private vocal lessons.** Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal cords and lung capacity) the younger body is not yet ready for the rigors and details of private instruction.

- **Brass and woodwind instruments require physical exertion**, refined coordination, and lungpower. 9 years and older is a good time to start.

2. Use Researched, Recognized Teaching Materials & Methods

- **Not all books are equal.** There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are tailored to all levels and ages of students. For maximum results, it is important to be studying from educationally sound literature that does not confuse and ultimately frustrating the student. We use books and methods that have been researched and are continually upgraded to make learning easier and more effective.
- **Choose Books and Programs That Have a Holistic Approach.** Effective lessons address all parts of the learning process to incorporate multiple skills early on. For example, some piano books realize the importance of featuring songs that promote healthy hand technique while other books use material that actually causes physical discomfort that can lead to repetitive injury symptoms. In choirs, some programs teach children how to both read music and hear harmonies rather than learning purely by rote repetition. Be sure to find a program that has taken all aspects of your child's music education into account.

3. Take Music Lessons in a Professional Teaching Environment

- **An environment that is focused on music education** is just as important as studying with a qualified teacher. In a school environment, a student cannot be distracted by television, pets, ringing phones, siblings or other disruptions. With only 45-60 minutes of lesson time each week, a school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music.
- **Quality teaching tools** and materials for different types of learners are on-hand in each classroom. We understand multi-sensory learning – different students learn different ways. We do whatever it takes with rhythm sticks, balls, drums, music writing activities, etc. to get the concepts across for fun lessons and effective home practice.
- **Students are motivated** by working towards our Medal Levels, especially designed for each private lesson program. Students are also hearing peers at different levels performance master classes, and recitals. They are exposed to a variety of musical instruments.
- **In a music school, teaching is a responsibility that is taken very seriously by the staff**, not just a hobby or sideline profession. Our teachers are always fine-tuning their teaching skills with our medal level based curriculum, staff meetings, director feedback, and the unique teaching tools used at our school. Teachers love our educational environment, and they pass this enthusiasm along to their students.

4. Practicing Made Easier

As with anything, improving in music requires practice. Practicing is an enjoyable activity when presented in a positive format. Here are some ways to make practicing easier, more motivating and stress free.

- **Time** – Set the same time every day to practice so that it becomes part of a routine. This works particularly well for children. Generally the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding is required of the parents, and the more alert and productive the student can be.
- **Goals** – The teacher should have clear practice goals written down for the student to follow each week. Our school uses a daily check system on assignment sheets that helps the children effectively use their practice time to produce quality results.
- **Rewards** - Parents can encourage children to practice by granting them rewards for successful practicing. In our school, we reward young children with stickers (it always works!) and an accountability system using free passes if a particular week has been very busy. Students learn to be accountable to themselves, which is the greatest personal lesson to be taken from a music education. Praise and encouragement is the most coveted reward.

5. Private Lessons or Classes – Which Is Better?

- **Private lessons are a must for the intermediate and advanced students** who have grasped the basics of technique and reading music, and for the older beginner (9 and older) These students learn at their own pace and have their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Our medal levels guide students through skills while allowing room for individual goals and guidelines for improvement.
- **Younger children (16 months - 8 years old) learn faster while having more fun** in a productive class setting. Our class sizes are small and kept to a maximum of 4 students. It's all about making music together and staying motivated while learning the basics of music technique, rhythm ear-training, ensemble playing and reading music. Students learn from the feedback directed towards them and the other students in the class. They benefit tremendously from these multiple learning experiences. Students who learned their first skills together with their peers tend to have better retention with their musical studies throughout their middle school and high school years.
- **Motivation is higher for the younger student** in a class setting. Music theory, ear training and sight singing skills are more memorable, exciting and fun when shared with other children. A class setting invariably fosters more relaxed performers.

Have Fun! Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime. Try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey.