

## ***FEATURE ARTICLE***

### ***“Encouraging Consistent Practice”***

#### ***Practice Makes Perfect...***

Without practice it is almost impossible for a student to continually improve at the piano. Extra practice is extremely important for every piano student on the road to improvement. Although I can not be in your home to force or oversee a consistent practice schedule, I have implemented ways of increasing the likelihood of more frequent practice sessions and I have listed here some ideas on how to encourage practice without a fight.

#### ***How often should each student practice?***

Ideally, each student should practice at least once a day. I realize with our busy lives practice can be hard to fit in, but aiming for once a day usually ensures enough practice throughout the week.

#### ***No one Regrets Learning an Instrument***

How many people look back and wish their parents had forced them to play piano? Many of us started music lessons and didn't finish because our parents allowed us to quit or didn't force us to practice. I've met many people who regret quitting piano lessons, but none who regret sticking with it. I love to play now, but as a child I thought I didn't want to play and tried everything to get out of practicing. I will always be grateful that my parents encouraged me to play and never let me quit until I reached an age where I could take what I had already learned (the hard part) and choose what to do with that knowledge and talent.

#### ***Common Misconceptions***

A common misconception is that a parent should not have to force their child to practice or that a parent should not have to remind their child to practice. When a child complains about practice or doesn't practice without reminders (Ok, let's call it nagging) parents often misconstrue these normal behaviors as a sign that their child should quit piano because they weren't meant for it or don't love it enough. It is normal for children to avoid practice. Afterall, practice is hard! But as we all know, great accomplishments do not come easy. Practice can be grueling at times, but improvement in any instrument or at any activity requires hard work. Every student (and teacher!) has days where they don't feel like practicing, but we all do things we don't want to do when we are working towards something valuable. Getting your children to practice, even when they don't want to, is just one part of the process when your child is learning an instrument.

Parents often give up on piano because they are tired of resorting to constant nagging about practice, they notice their child suddenly seems uninterested in the piano, or they are worried they are pushing their own dreams on their child. Children go through stages... some months they love playing the piano and you won't even need to ask them to practice, and some months they are sick of it and feel it's just too hard. They will go back and forth a lot and there is nothing abnormal about this. Teaching a child to stick with something and take the committed route, through thick and thin, is an important life lesson. By using some of the tips below you may be able to avoid some of the nagging and add a sense of enjoyment and accomplishment to practicing!

### ***Tips for Encouraging Consistent Practice***

Below are some tips and common motivators to help get your child to practice piano. Remember different motivators work well for different people. The key is to figure out which motivators work the best with your child.

#### ***Follow their Weekly Practice Schedule:***

At each piano lesson my students are given a detailed practice schedule, depending on skill level and age, to be followed at each practice session at home. The schedule lists each piano piece to be played, the number of times to play each piece and typically something fun and enjoyable to finish off with. I will also encourage your child to go beyond the practice schedule after their practice session is over, if they feel inspired. Because most children strive on consistency and structure, try to set aside a specific time each day for practice.

#### ***Use a Timer & Enforce a Daily Consistent Time Length:***

Many of the parents of my most successful students use a timer to make sure their child gets in enough practice. Try to find a silent timer (without the constant clicking noise) and set it at the proper time length depending on your child's age and skill level. This is a great way to add structure to each daily practice session. Go over their practice schedule prior to a practice session and explain that they must play the practice schedule repeatedly until the timer runs out.

#### ***Use Rewards:***

Bribery is a great motivator! If you don't want to spend your life savings on bribing your kids to practice (trust me, I know it gets expensive!) try offering up something they will likely be getting anyway: a cookie, their allowance, a trip to the park, whatever works. You can even use a future large present (summer camp, a sleepover, a toy they have always wanted, an animal) to motivate them to practice as they earn their reward over time. Make a chart and have them practice 6x a week for X amount of minutes for X amount of weeks and remind them they are working towards a goal to get {insert bribery item of choice}.

### ***Use Consequences:***

Set rules that they must practice before they engage in their favorite activities. Every child has something they normally get to do that they get excited about. It could be going out to play with friends or getting to watch their favorite TV shows. Set rules so that they know if they don't practice before the TV show or before they go out with their friends, they will have to miss out.

### ***Give Praise & Encourage Opportunities for Performance:***

People thrive on attention. The more praise you give the more your children will be excited about their piano skills and inspired to practice. Praise gives them a sense of accomplishment and lets them know all this hard work is really paying off. It is also important for each student to receive praise from people other than Mom & Dad. Children often assume their parents HAVE to praise them and are biased, so outside praise helps to solidify their sense of achievement. Have them play for friends and family who are visiting your house or arrange for them to play at the school talent show. When a student feels the thrill of playing for an audience and hearing their praises it can propel them forward and inspire them in ways you wouldn't believe.

### ***Point out the Benefits of gaining this Skill:***

Learning the piano builds self confidence. When a child realizes that their new skill sets them apart from many of their peers it gives them a greater sense of self worth. Remind them that they are building a skill that many people will not have. Their classmates may be entirely impressed by their talent and have a greater respect for the student, especially when they learn to play the latest popular songs.

### ***Remind them of the Fun they have playing their favorite pieces:***

Inevitably all students have some favorite pieces that they constantly go back to. They go back to play these pieces over and over because they find playing them is personally rewarding and they love the music. Remind them that although their newer pieces may seem hard and grueling to practice they might just end up your next favorite. All their favorite pieces started out very difficult. These may be the same. With lots of practice, they will soon be playing these hard pieces very easily out of sheer joy because they worked so hard towards that goal.

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