

Practical Practicing Pointers

- **Scheduling**
 - Pick a time of day when both parent & child are at maximum energy.
 - Be consistent!
 - If it's not possible to practice the same time every day, it can help to create a weekly schedule and keep it visible in the practice area.
 - On busy days, there is still probably time for a brief practice session...better than none at all!
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- **Listen! Listen! Listen!**
 - This is true for both the Suzuki student and the traditional. The Cd for Essential Elements is great for giving students examples of how their assignments should sound. They can also practice with it.
- **Location**
 - Have a designated practicing location and keep it in the same place – keep the instrument there when it's not in use.
 - Choose one that's away from distractions like phone calls, siblings, TV, etc.
 - Keep in mind that the student's bedroom itself can be a distraction and can lead to a "goofing off" attitude, so it's preferable to use it only if there is no other ideal place.
- **PLAY!!**
 - It's called PLAY the violin, not WORK the violin!! Have fun, play games, be joyful!
 - Visit "Practice Games" on next page
- **Use short-term rewards, and lots of them!**
 - Younger children have little or no concept of long-term rewards. They rarely ever think, "I'm practicing my left hand position now so I'll be able to do vibrato in book 2." It's helpful for the parent to create short-term, attainable goals with visible results. These don't have to be tangible rewards. They can "earn" a link on a paper chain, a sticker, or can draw part of a picture. They can earn TV time, pick a movie, invite a friend over, story time, play a game, later bed time, computer time, favorite snack or dessert, etc.
 - Charts
Enter: the practice chart. You can use the one I provide during lessons or copy them over each week onto a more interesting and colorful chart. You can use charts for daily practice, review, essential concepts that have been mastered, anything. You can fill in the chart with check marks, stickers, glued sequins, etc. I do recommend making quite a ceremony out of letting the child place the sticker in the box on the chart.
 - Small rewards for remembering to practice without being reminded
- **Avoid the P-word**
 - For some students, the word "practice" already has negative connotation. Instead of saying "it's time to practice, or go practice now," you could try, "I'd love to hear some pretty music now" or "Hey lets go play some violin!" or "Your violin is getting lonely! Lets go keep it company."

- **Empower the student**
 - Some children really enjoy taking control of their environment – this is good! Let them be “in charge” of informing the parent it’s time to practice. Some enjoy knowing that the parent needs their help to remember. The child can be the one to check off the practice chart, or to put a sticker on a review chart.
- **End on a good note!**
 - Set a timer and make sure time is up while the practice session is still happy and playful – leave them wanting more
- **Attitude**
 - Be playful! “Children respond well when families value order, yet convey it with a light touch & sense of humor.”
 - If you are enthusiastic & optimistic, your child will be, too!
 - Give specific praise for what was accomplished, then guide what needs improvement (“That was such a great bow hold! Now let’s focus on remembering notes.” Whatever you do, don’t say, “That sounded terrible! Do it again, and this time, do it right!”)
- Emphasis on both kinds of practice: mastering important sections of music, and playing through the whole piece
- **Video- or Tape-recording**
 - Encourage them to make recordings for relatives – they make great gifts and are fun to listen to years down the road!
 - Make recordings for your teacher! I’d love to see how practicing happens at home, and I’d be happy to make suggestions.
- **Motivation**
 - Exposure! Immerse child in a musical environment. Expose them to orchestra concerts, solo concerts, music competitions, listen to classical CDs as well as Suzuki, buy music played by famous string players. Help them be inspired!
- **Do it together**
 - Make sure they know you’re there for them.
 - Be supportive.
- **Teach your child that a mistake is a gift!** The music is saying “Practice me here! Pay attention to me!”
- **Arrange home recitals** – Play for family, friends, relatives, etc. Go all out if you can, print a program, invite a friend to play too.