

Dear Suzuki Parent

By Sharron Beamer

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Welcome to the Suzuki family. This advice is based on nearly twenty years of teaching experience. I offer it to you only because I know it works.

BEFORE THE LESSON

It is essential, if you have not already done so, that you read 'NURTURED BY LOVE' by Shinichi Suzuki.

On the way to the lesson, discuss cheerfully with 'our child what you expect he will do during the lesson. 'Your review piece is really sounding good. I'm looking forward to hearing it.' 'I wonder if your teacher will notice how good you are getting at keeping your eyes on the bow.' 'Will naughty Mr One" remember to stay on the E string?' etc.

Cut the child's fingernails. Take him to toilet.

DURING THE LESSON

Bring a notebook (the same one each week), a pen and your diary. Check the notice board for workshops, concerts and special dates. Keep careful notes on what (and how) you are to practice. Ask, if anything is unclear.

Keep violin, music, note book, foot mat (and anything else you need) together in your 'kit,' a large, heavy duty shopping bag, or similar.

Unless strictly necessary, it is best if you don't speak to your child during the lesson. The child should have only **ONE teacher at a time**. Sometimes your child may do something to irritate or embarrass you. Don't worry. Your teacher may have four children of her own at home, and has probably taught hundreds of children over the years. Teachers have seen it all before. It's best for the teacher to cope with the child in his or her own way. It is necessary for the child and teacher to form a relationship free from interference. Your teacher is quite capable of setting limits. It is important that the lessons are friendly and enjoyable. If teachers seem to be indulging a child it is for a good reason. It's not because they can't be firm.

On the other hand, if a teacher speaks sharply to your child, don't be alarmed. She's not really angry. It's calculated to stop the child from indulging in negative habit patterns, and the friendship for the child doesn't alter.

Please do let the teacher know if illness or trauma means they need to be especially sensitive to the child on some days.

AFTER THE LESSON

Compliment the child on what he or she did well. For example: 'I liked the way you listened carefully to everything your teacher said' or, 'Wasn't your bow hold good today! We're really worked on that, haven't we? All your hard work has paid off.'

If the child behaved badly it's counter-productive to make a comment like: 'You were so naughty.' 'What a bad girl.' 'I was ashamed of you.' It's better to say, 'I don't like silliness.' Attack the behaviour, not the child.

NO LESSON?

If a child is persistently uncooperative, a wise teacher will not get into a power struggle and reward the behaviour with lots of attention and cajoling. Your teacher will likely stop the lesson and send him or her home without the lesson sticker. Don't worry and don't scold. Take the child away quickly in a firm, but matter-of-fact manner. NO LESSON should always equal NO ATTENTION. Don't worry if the child is crying. This is a good sign. Explain that you are disappointed but that you are looking forward to next week when you think he will remember that he is there to do his work, to pay attention, etc.

Bad behaviour is usually the result of one of two things: BAD BEHAVIOUR GETS ME LOTS OF ATTENTION, or I'M TOO AFRAID OF FAILURE TO TRY.

If it's the former, WITHDRAW ATTENTION. Please don't laugh if your child is rude or silly. Don't rush to his defence with an excuse. 'He's had a bad day at school.' 'She's very tired.' Avert your gaze from the child and let the teacher deal with it. The time to tell the teacher your child is not on form is before the lesson. We don't want to send the child the message that if he has had a bad time he is justified in giving other people a bad time. We could all be wonderful if we were never tired, ill, frustrated or annoyed. Bad behaviour remains bad behaviour, whatever the provocation. It isn't easy for anyone of any age, but character is developed by endeavouring to do the right thing under all conditions.

If it is the latter, **please be aware of your comments to your child and the quality and consistency of your practice.** Does your child feel unprepared? Does he fear his efforts will meet with criticism from you rather than encouragement and delight?

HOME PRACTICE

This is the golden rule: YOU GET WHAT YOU GIVE ATTENTION TO. If you want your child to be cooperative, praise him when he is cooperative even if that is only two percent of the time. CATCH HIM DOING SOMETHING RIGHT. If your child can't maintain a bow hold but manages to get through one bar of music before the bow hold disintegrates, say delightedly, 'Your bow hold was perfect while you played E-2-2! Can you keep it that good while you play the next bit?' If he can't, offer encouragement rather than criticism or contempt. 'The fingers need more practice. Let's remind them what to do and try again.' It is you and the child as a team trying to coordinate fingers, arms, posture, etc., together. Be your child's ally, not his adversary.

LISTEN TO THE TAPE, LISTEN TO THE TAPE, LISTEN TO THE TAPE!

If you are not playing the Suzuki recording every day, you are not participating in the Suzuki method. Listening to the tape is vital.

HOW MUCH PRACTICE?

Dr Suzuki often said, 'You don't have to practice every day. Only on the days you eat.' No parent has ever said to me,

'We've had such a busy week that I just didn't have time to feed Judy this week. I'm going to feed her double next week to make up for it.' For the well being of your child, so that he can realise his potential and have a positive self image, please don't embark on this if you are not fully committed.

Dr Suzuki also said, '**Never rush. Never rest.**' Daily practice is what generates ability. Ability generates enthusiasm for the lesson and for practice. This is the cycle that moves you forward. If it is broken, momentum is lost. **How much practice you should be doing depends on age and level.** Ask your teacher.

NOTHING WORKS?

You've tried everything. The child still wastes time. Won't pay attention. Argues. When you arrive at the lesson you feel frustrated. You have made an enormous effort and have nothing to show for it. You feel angry. Here is what NOT to do. **DON'T BELITTLE THE CHILD IN FRONT OF THE TEACHER** (or anyone else). You are his best friend, remember? It isn't a friendly thing to do. A humiliated child can scarcely be expected to enjoy learning the violin. Talk to the teacher privately.

One mother had a very difficult child. Practice was a nightmare. This went on for a year. I finally thought to ask them to keep a record of their practice and report to me any GOOD practice sessions they had. The next week I asked mother for their report. She made a great show of looking through her notes and then said cheerfully, 'We had a really good practice on Tuesday.' Tears came to my eyes. She didn't need to tell me what she had been through the other six days.

How difficult it must have been for her to suppress her frustration and say something positive. That was seven years ago. Her son is still playing the violin.

It is possible to be firm without being destructive. Sometimes we assume too much. Although we may think it is obvious, a child doesn't always realise that certain behaviour is unacceptable. A gentle, 'Darling, it's wrong to speak to your mummy that way,' is sometimes enough. We cannot be rude to a child and expect polite behaviour in return, One can send a child to his room, withhold treats, etc. without humiliating the child. Insist on good behaviour. One isn't fully human without it.

Some parents, who wouldn't hesitate to insist that their child clean his teeth or learn his multiplication table, feel guilty when taking the same positive line about music practice. Why? Would your adult child thank you if he were not numerate, or literate? Many, many people express regret that they were allowed to stop music lessons. Many, including my own often obdurate children, are grateful that they were made to persevere.

Keep a note book of every positive comment you make to the child during practice. (No back-handed compliments please: 'You didn't fool around as much as usual today,' is not a compliment!) A better response would be, 'I was impressed with your concentration today. It's really getting good!'

Give the child treats: Dr Suzuki believed in them and so do I. Some parents say, 'Oh, I don't want to have to bribe my child. I want him to enjoy music for its own sake.' First of all, a bribe is something one is offered for doing something immoral or illegal. A treat is a reward for a job well done. Secondly, how can a beginner enjoy making music? There is so much to learn: bow hold, posture, finger placement, tone, rhythm, string crossing and more—and we still can't even play Twinkle yet! Please parents, give the kid a break. Praise him. Reward him. When he looks your way, **smile** ♥♥