

Three Little Secrets for Getting Your Child to Practice Consistently



“30 minutes a day, 7 days a week.” “Keith, have you practiced your piano yet?” “Sarah, I’m not going to tell you again, go practice your piano!”. “Tommy, if you don’t practice your piano, I’m taking away your cell phone!”. Sound familiar? Do you feel frustrated with your child’s lack of consistent practice? Are you at your wits end with trying to find out how to motivate your child to practice on his own? Are you wondering if you are just throwing your hard earned money away on piano lessons? If *any* of these statements “strike a tone” for you, then you are going to love this report! Read on...

Many parents and teachers assume, much to their own frustration, that once a child has started piano lessons, he child will also know how to practice effectively. Unfortunately, effective practicing is a learned, not an innate skill. Fortunately, it can be learned by anyone!

Parents and teachers need to teach a child *how to learn*. This seemingly innocuous statement is imperative to insure the success of the child. Just because a child has started a new learning venture of music making at the piano, does not mean he knows how to practice. The most important point is to create a feeling of success at practicing for your child.

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Laboratory Rats and Humans

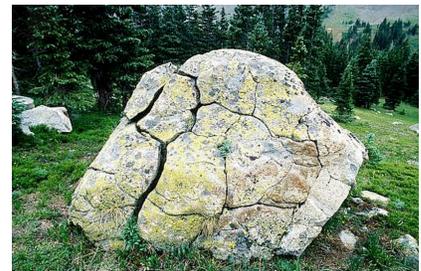


Remember reading, in college, about those lab experiments in which a lab rat gets a shock for moving in a certain direction in a cage? Well, if the scientist eventually electrifies the entire cage, the rat will simply stop moving to avoid the negative consequences. While we are not lab rats, human beings become conditioned in the same manner. If a child goes to the piano, and continues to get frustrated, each and every time he attempts to practice, he is learning that practicing equals great frustration and will eventually condition himself to dislike the learning process at the piano. A living beings goal is to consistently avoid pain and receive pleasure. Practice that equals frustration is avoided, practice that equals pleasure (success) is sought after.

There are three skills that are necessary to develop to insure that your child feels successful while practicing the piano. It is up to a parent or teacher to assist a child in mastering these skills. The first is...

Breaking Big Challenges into Little Ones

Many students, upon being given a new song to learn, will attempt to learn the entire song all at once, playing from the beginning to the end, without correcting errors. This is an ineffective learning pattern (I.L.P.) that an adult will need to assist the child in changing. If the child continues to practice this way, he will eventually feel frustrated just at the thought of practicing, a negative “reward”.

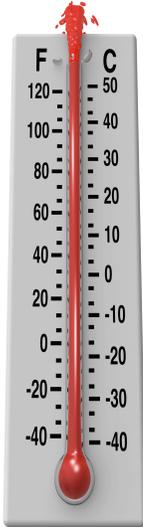


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Monitoring Frustration



Once I read that a sure sign of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, the same way, while expecting a different result! At the very least, if it doesn't make you insane, it will get you very frustrated!

Frustration is an inevitable part of learning. Your child's *response* to frustration will determine his experience of learning. If he understands that it is okay to feel frustrated, he can also then develop *effective* skills to handle the frustration.

Just as muscle ache is the muscle's way of telling you to stop, such is frustration to the brain. Frustration to the brain is equivalent to lactic acid build up in the muscle. If you ignore it, eventually you will have a break down. In the case of the muscle, the muscle will stop performing. In the case of the brain, the brain will cease to perform effectively.

Stop a moment, and think of yourself. Have you done the same thing, over and over, the same way in an effort to get your child to practice, and gotten the same result (No Practice!)? Didn't *you* feel frustrated?! Well, that is exactly how piano students feel when they are not achieving their goals while practicing.

While handling frustration effectively is a second skill that your child needs to master in order to be successful at the piano, there is also a third skill that is equally important.

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Consistent Commitment

Starving yourself for two days, and then eating for three, is not an effective way, in the long run, of losing weight. Practicing for two hours one day and then skipping four is equally as ineffective for learning to master the piano. True long-term mastery comes from daily follow through. Most children do not know how to do this, but we can assist them in learning this important skill...

Even though a child may love the piano, he may simply forget to practice each day. The day begins with a late rise, quick change, an equally fast breakfast and off to school. Six hours later, a child needs a “learning break”, home from school he should participate in something non-academic, preferably something physical to let his brain rest. After the break, dinner. After dinner homework. Gosh, when is there time to practice!

What Can You Do?

Effective practicing is a learned art in itself. Just because your child has started piano lessons, and even enjoys making music, does not guarantee that he will practice effectively or even enjoy practicing. He may need a reminder, and assistance from you, in setting up an appropriate time to practice, a time where he is not distracted by other activities in the home. Even the best of adults need to be reminded to follow through on their commitments; children are no different. They need compassionate, firm support and continued motivation. Think of yourself. Have you ever started a diet? How many times did you have to “recommit”? How many times did you start for a week or two, then fall short of your commitment for an “extended” weekend and then restart...again and again and again? Children are no different. They need constant and consistent motivation, constant and compassionate reminders.

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SECRET ONE: ONE BRICK AT A TIME

If your child is having difficulty breaking big intimidating songs into more bite size pieces, you may want to try the following:



Suggest that the child break a piece into more achievable smaller parts. The size of the part is up to the learner. If a page is too much, suggest two lines. If two lines are too much, suggest one. If one line is too much, suggest a couple of measures. If a couple of measures with two hands are too much, suggest playing it with hands separately. Assist your child in creating a challenge that he perceives as accomplishable. Measures turn into lines, lines into pages and pages into songs, all a little at a time. Feelings of frustration turn into feelings of success.

SECRET TWO: USING FRUSTRATION TO FUEL SUCCESS

If you see your child getting frustrated, ask what he is feeling frustrated with. Then ask the child what he wants to do about it. If he permits you to assist him (some children would prefer to go at it on their own) offer two options.

The first is to take a short break from the piece. This may mean a walk around the house, or it could be as short as a deep breath, but take a break.

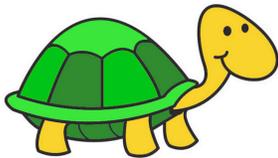
The second option, if you are capable, is to offer musical information that will make the task easier. If you never had music lessons, suggest the child contact his teacher. Many teachers extend email or voicemail to their students as a way of supporting their daily practice. If the teacher is unreachable, have your child write down the difficult area and ask his teacher with help on that one area at the next lesson.

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I already mentioned that frustration is the brain's way of requesting a break. It also comes with another message; the brain may need more information to accomplish the task it is attempting. If your child is getting frustrated, he may simply need more information to accomplish the piece he is practicing. Information he may or may not have, but information, that his teacher will have

SECRET THREE: SLOW AND STEADY WINS THE RACE



While we may not like it, a developing learner (age is immaterial), may need to be gently reminded, each day, to practice. No yelling, no threats, just a simple reminder.

The first step would be to set up a practice time for your child and then to remind them when that time arrives. Maybe before school, or after dinner. Decide with your child which works best for them.

The second step is to simply ask, “Brianna, did you finish all of your responsibilities today?” This way the child starts to become more responsible for her own success.

Don't get discouraged if this process of shifting 100% of the responsibility takes time. Your child is learning, and learning takes time. Remember, education is a marathon not a sprint. Each step forward is a step in the right direction.



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So is it worth it? Absolutely! Remember, you are not only providing your child with the gift of music, but more importantly, if you use the learning of playing the piano as a metaphor for learning in general, you will be providing your child with a gift that will enable him to accomplish anything that he puts his mind and heart into!