

1 How delightful it can be for the parent and the student when practice sessions are conducted in a way that is both instructive and enjoyable! Let us, then, consider some essentials that will help to make them so. First of all, practice is most effective when it is regular. Left up to chance or to a spur-of-the-moment decision, it is likely to be infrequent at best. Coming up with a regular time that is convenient for all can be a challenge, so you might need to try several different times until you finally find a slot that works for you.

2 Once you have a suitable time slot, be careful not to allow distractions to crowd out the practice. Let the answering machine take your phone calls or tell callers you will return their call later. Provide for siblings so that they will not need your attention during the practice session. By devoting yourself exclusively to your child during your practice time with him, you send the message that he and the work you are doing together is what is most important to you.

3 How long should the practice last? As we discussed in an earlier session, we may spend a few minutes several times a day for a very young beginner, just practicing one skill, or a longer period with varied activities. Take to heart the old stage adage, "Leave the audience wanting more." If things are going well in the practice, don't push for more but finish before the child tires and he may ask, "Is it over already?" As the student progresses, there will be more things to work on and the practice session will increase in length correspondingly. Practice sessions for more advanced students should be long enough to accomplish all the tasks the teacher has assigned, as a rule of thumb, rather than a specific amount of time.

4 Take careful notes at the lesson, so that you will know what to work on at home during the week, and be sure you understand how to assist your child with all the tasks the teacher has assigned. If you have questions, ask them before you leave the studio or call the teacher when you run into problems during the week. Don't waste the whole week because you didn't know what to do! Also, be sure you understand the important concept of 'one-point' lessons.

5 Learning occurs best under peaceful conditions. So cultivate a relaxed, yet respectful atmosphere. Keep in mind that proper lighting, cheerful and uncluttered surroundings and having the necessary equipment handy all contribute to tranquility. But if they have a portable instrument, children may occasionally be allowed to choose where they would like to hold a practice session for a change of pace. Bathrooms usually have very interesting acoustics! You may occasionally want to go out of doors or to a nearby park.

6 If you make practice sessions enjoyable for the children they will eagerly look forward to them. Be enthusiastic yourself, for enthusiasm is contagious. Suzuki observed that children learn abilities best when they are having fun. Think of practice as a game for you and your child rather than serious business. For children to enjoy their practice they must also feel involved. You might accomplish this by allowing the child to choose the order of the items to be worked on during the session. Asking questions is also a fine way to get children involved. Instead of *telling* the child to "fix" this or that about his playing, *ask* him to be responsible to "notice" things, such as whether his thumb stayed bent or the second finger came down in the correct spot.

7 The mood of the practice session should be such that the child's mind is receptive to instruction. By all means, avoid thoughtless comments that stab such as, "What's the matter with you?" or "Why can't you do this?" Be compassionate and find pleasure in your children and support them as they endeavor to learn. Avoid making the practice session a period for discipline and punishment. In such an atmosphere, not much learning will take place. Smiles, hugs, and positive up-building comments are great motivators.

8 Parents in the Suzuki approach have the responsibility of being the "home teacher" and providing the environment that will nurture the child with love. Develop the skills to conduct effective and enjoyable practice sessions, and you will find your efforts have been worthwhile.