

MOTIVATION NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

1 When the newness and excitement of beginning music study wears off and the reality of the weekly routine of going to lessons and practicing sets in, what can keep us motivated? While we have the expectation that our children will continue the study of music over the long haul because we think it is something valuable for them, it is not the Suzuki approach to force the child. We want them to want to play. What motivated your child to want to take lessons in the first place? Did you attend a concert or hear a music recording that caused your child to fall in love with a particular instrument? Does he or she have a friend who plays an instrument? You can use such motivating factors as attending concerts or playing music with friends for keeping up interest in the ongoing process of music study.

2 By taking a child to concerts, we allow him to see and hear polished performances on his chosen instrument. He can observe the technique of advanced musicians firsthand, and be inspired by the music. Maybe it was a friend who initiated your child's desire to learn an instrument. Children enjoy playing music with their friends, and thus the group lessons that are a part of the Suzuki experience should not be overlooked for their motivational value. (Nurtured by Love, p. 96) Music is a shared experience and if the child only goes to lessons and comes home to practice, he may begin to lose interest. Children can develop life-long friendships with their peers at the group lessons and the opportunities to play in group concerts are a big motivation to practice.

3 Suzuki institutes, which are held across the country during the summer months, provide a week-long musical experience and some have said that this week is the equivalent of six months of music lessons. Students have three or four classes each day, including repertoire class (similar in format to group lessons), master class, and several supplemental classes such as orchestra, music history, fiddling, eurhythmics, dance, etc. Additionally, there are recitals, concerts, parent seminars and other activities. Institutes are a huge motivation for both students and parents and some families attend year after year.

4 Suzuki said that an individual lesson meant that all students and parents of that day should be in the same room quietly observing one student being taught at a time. While that is undoubtedly impractical for your situation, it may occasionally be possible to observe the lessons of students whose times precede or follow that of your child. In doing this, students are motivated by their friends' progress and parents are also inspired by seeing how other children are encouraged and develop. Be careful however, if you observe the lessons of other students, that it doesn't become an occasion for making comparisons between your child and others.

5 Listening to the model recordings of the Suzuki repertoire not only helps to build musical sensitivity, but also creates in the child the desire to play the music heard. If you turn on the recording of his current repertoire a few minutes before the practice period, you may find him actually coming to practice voluntarily! Additionally, we have to make sure that our daily practice routine itself is conducive to a continued desire to study. The use of "one-point lessons," in which one point is chosen to work on at each session, keeps the student from the frustration of having too many things to concentrate on at once. Eliminate or minimize extrinsic rewards and acknowledge the effort and improvements your child is making, encouraging feelings of success and progress. Avoid praise that compares your child to someone else or that makes sweeping comments like, "You're such a good player." Rather, be judicious in the use of praise, making it genuine and as specific as possible. Practice no longer than the child's attention span warrants, or as Suzuki said, "Stop when the child yawns." "Orange Crate Concerts" can also put incentive and joy into practice. (See Ability Development from Age Zero, p. 15) Finally, you may wish to obtain some other books from the Reading List and from time to time re-read Nurtured by Love for your own motivation.