

Parent Focus

—Michelle Baylor, February 2010

The Suzuki Method is unique in part because it involves the triangle of student, teacher, and parent. Teacher and parent work together to support the student's growth and development as a person as well as a musician. As the parent of a Suzuki student, your role is critical in your child's learning.

Do I have to know how to play the piano or read music?

Nope! The teacher's job is to understand how to play the instrument. The parent's job is to understand what the teacher expects and how the child is to practice in order to achieve the goals agreed on at the lesson. Hopefully parents learn some fundamental basics of music along with their children, but prior knowledge is not necessary.

How do I help my child get ready on lesson day?

It is very helpful if your student can practice the morning of his/her lesson. At the very least, make sure the necessary lesson book and music books are packed and in the car. On the way over to the lesson, play the CD. Focus on the pieces the student is working on, maybe reviewing goals verbally as you listen. Try to arrive at the lesson a little early so you and your child don't feel rushed or frantic. Come in quietly and listen to the previous lesson until it is time to play.

What should I do at the lesson?

Although your role will change over time, your basic job at the lesson is that of silent secretary. Please sit where you can easily see and hear what is going on. Follow the flow of the lesson, taking notes for your own reference, and be sure to write down the practice assignments and goals made by the teacher. Ask questions for clarification, but try hard to let the teacher work directly with your child. Interjecting with too many comments or suggestions can be confusing or frustrating for your child, and may disrupt the learning process.

What do I do at home?

Your most important jobs at home are those of listening director and practice coach.

How do I turn into listening director?

Make it your responsibility to play the CD EVERY DAY. Several times a day is best, but at least choose one consistent time when you will remember to play the recording while the student is around to listen.

What does a practice coach do?

As practice coach, you practice with your child each day. You guide the child through the practice instructions given by the teacher. Offer as much encouragement and as little criticism as possible. Help the child remember the goals of each part of practice. Early in the week, tell him/her the goals and assignments. Later in the week, ask him/her to tell you.

What if I'm having trouble?

If we're going to build a successful triangle, all of the sides have to work together. If you're having trouble with something, or you feel the teacher's instructions are unclear, or your child is responding in negative ways, please talk to the teacher! Often a lesson isn't the best time to address issues, so feel free to e-mail your question or set up a phone appointment to talk about whatever concerns you have. We're all learning together, and each combination of student-parent-teacher is unique. No one develops alone!

Do I still attend lessons when my child is in college?!!

Of course not!! Your role will change over time as your student matures and as his/her musical skills develop. Normally around the ages of 8-10, your child begins looking for more independence. At this stage, you and the teacher will focus more on helping your child become more responsible for his/her own learning. You will still attend lessons, but may fade more into the background and observe from behind rather than next to the piano. You will continue to help your child practice, but may do so more through asking questions and offering reminders rather than sitting with the student for the whole practice session. Eventually, somewhere in junior high, you will become the encourager. Your student will come to lessons on his/her own and will practice independently. You will help your student arrange his/her schedule to include time for lessons and practice. You can listen to your student play and enjoy the fruits of many years of hard work!

"Children learn to smile from their parents." —Shinichi Suzuki