

Motivating Your Student to Practice

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Sometimes, once the novelty of the new lessons wears off, motivation wanes, even though you both know that she likes her lessons and performing music. So, what can you do to help your child enjoy their practicing and realize their full musical potential?

The key is to **help them LOVE to practice!** I'll say it again: Kids *can* love to practice! Yes, it's true! This happens when kids are **SELF-MOTIVATED** to practice. There are lots of things that parents can do to help children develop self-motivation and love for practicing.

1) Don't treat practicing like a chore or punishment.

Try not to treat practicing as a chore or something the child "has to do". When you speak about practicing to your student, speak of it positively as if it's something exciting that they get to do rather than have to do. This makes a big difference in the way that your child perceives practicing.

2) Help them notice the natural (and good!) instant gratification that comes from practicing.

As they practice, praise them for the things they are doing well. When you notice improvement, point it out! Help them understand that by practicing, they are receiving rewards of being able to play certain passages better and of being a better musician. This is the good kind of instant gratification! As they practice, small things will improve. Help them love their small improvements.

3) Motivate them with performance opportunities.

Young students, especially, may be motivated by small performance opportunities at home. When Grandma comes over, ask your student if they would like to perform a song for her. Grandma will love it and your child will love performing for her. Some students have natural performance anxiety. If this is the case, do not force your child to perform, as this may link unpleasant feelings/memories with making music.

4) Help them to not feel overwhelmed by their practicing.

If twenty minutes of practice seems like too much in your kiddo's mind, break it up into segments. Instead of twenty minutes all in a row, try three segments of approximately six minutes, or two segments of ten minutes. Some kids will really get into the math and some will just be excited about the shorter, more manageable chunks of time. Remember that *some* practicing is always better than *no* practicing.

5) Help them to feel in charge of their practicing.

Allow your child to choose when he practices. Perhaps you give him three options: right after school, right before dinner, or right after dinner. When he feels that he is more in charge of his practicing, he will be more excited to do it.

6) Let them teach you.

Kids love reversing roles and getting to be the teacher. Ask your child why she is playing something a certain way or why the notes on the page look how they do. What's the meaning of that funny Italian word on the music? Make sure not to ask in a condescending tone, but in a way that allows her to teach you. Likely, she will love the opportunity to demonstrate her knowledge!

7) Be careful with reward systems.

Reward systems sometimes work well, though nothing too elaborate should be used. Maybe the student can bake cookies if they practiced for at least the minimum amount of time during a given week. Maybe the student gets a sticker each day they practice all of their songs. We really want to be careful that students don't get too fixated on artificial rewards and instead we want to help students see and be motivated by the natural rewards of practicing- becoming a better musician!

8) Switch up activities.

If your child seems bored with their current instrument after a few years, offer them the opportunity to switch instruments if they want to. Trying something new brings back the spark of excitement and helps students feel more in charge of their music education. Just make sure that your student has had a chance to really give their instrument a good try before trying something new.

Implement these strategies at home and your child will come to value music-making for its inherent rewards. They will become self-motivated to practice and will find the spark in their music-making.