

# Learning to Play: Tips for Parents of Young Musicians

Whether you play an instrument yourself or can't even whistle, these tips will help you guide your child into the wonderful world of music making.

## Choosing the right instrument

- Ask your child what sounds he/she likes and what instruments appeal to him/her.
- Talk to the school band director about your child's interest, as well as their size and facial structure, before making a decision. Most beginning band directors let students hold and try out different instruments to help them make a choice.
- Allow your child to explore. Many musicians started out on one instrument only to switch a few years later to another instrument with much greater success. The school band director can help you in this process.

## Practice Tips for Middle School Kids

- Help your child set up a regular time every day to practice.
- Help your child establish a routine. This may require some consultation with the teacher. A typical middle school student's half hour practice routine might include
  - Warm-up : 1-3 minutes
  - Play a fun, familiar piece : 3-5 minutes
  - Work on a new or difficult piece : 10-15 minutes
  - Work on technical requirements, such as scales or other technique builders : 5 minutes
  - Play something fun to conclude the session
- Help your child understand that playing only familiar songs will not help him/her improve.
- Explain to your child that learning happens in stages. Sometimes a student will work on something for a long time with no apparent improvement, and then discover a sudden leap in ability. Other times, learning happens very quickly. The important thing to stress is that consistent practice will yield results.
- Help your young musician set practice goals. Keeping a journal, not just a practice chart, helps track the peaks and valleys of learning a new piece or improving fundamental skills.
- As a parent, don't make judgments about the musical quality of your child's practicing. Learning an instrument requires lots of squeaks, scratches, and wrong notes.