

Brandon Encinas Violin/Viola Studio – Parent Education Packet

Every Child Can

More than fifty years ago, Japanese violinist **Shinichi Suzuki** realized the implications of the fact that children all over the world learn to speak their native language with ease. He began to apply the basic principles of language acquisition to the learning of music, and called his method the **mother-tongue approach**. The ideas of parent responsibility, loving encouragement, constant repetition, etc., are some of the special features of the Suzuki approach.

It was the belief of Dr. Suzuki that a child's musical ability is based off of their environment, and not from their genetic makeup. Ability and talent is available to everyone.

The Mother-Tongue Approach

Although music is not a language, the process of learning music is similar to that of learning language. Consider for a moment how you first learned to speak:

1. **Listening:** First, you listened to language. From the time of birth, and even before, you were surrounded by the sound of language and conversation. You absorbed these sounds and became acculturated to the language of your environment.
2. **Babbling:** Second, you tried (unsuccessfully at first) to imitate. Keep in mind that even before you were successful at imitating, you were praised for your efforts and encouraged to “babble,” even when the sounds that you were making did not make sense.
3. **Third,** you began to think in language. Words and phrases began to have meaning for you. You picked up the meaning through your experiences with language.
4. **Fourth,** you began to improvise in language. In other words, you were able to make up your own phrases and sentences that were organized in a logical manner. You were able to engage in conversation.
5. **Finally,** after several years of developing your ability to think, you were taught how to read and write. You learned to read with understanding because of all the experience you had listening, imitating, thinking, and improvising.

The Suzuki approach to learning music is the same. How would your language abilities have been affected if someone had tried to teach these steps in a different order? What if someone had tried to teach you to read and write before you could speak or understand conversation?

<https://www.ntste.com/learning-a-language>

The Ten Principles

- 1. Every Child is Able to Learn**
- 2. The Early Beginning**
- 3. Parental Support**
- 4. Listening**
- 5. Learning by Ear**
- 6. Observation and Imitation**
- 7. Encouragement**
- 8. Review and Internalization**
- 9. The Stimulating Environment**
- 10. Group Lessons**

1. Every Child is Able to Learn

Dear parents, your child learned to speak because you provided him/her the opportunity. If a child is surrounded after birth by musical sounds and stimulation, is later encouraged to actively participate in music and to learn to play an instrument, and **smallest successes are rewarded with praise and enjoyment**, then pleasure in music, self-confidence, and a **zest for learning will be the result**.

2. The Early Beginning

Science has shown that at no other age is a child capable of learning so fast, so intensely, and so broadly as when of pre-school age. The collected experiences in this developmental phase stamp their influence on the rest of his/her life. The Mother-Tongue Method is tailored exactly to the learning psychology of small children. For this reason, it is possible to begin lessons at age three or four. The exposure to good music cannot begin early enough, however. Already in the pre-natal phase, peaceful and sensitive sounds show their influence on the developing individual.

3. Parental Support

You, as parents, are the best specialists for child-appropriate learning, for you successfully taught your child to speak. If you also want to open the door to music for your child, then you should consider the following points:

Practice with your child every day, even when some days there is less time than necessary. If possible, practice should always occur at the same time of day and it should fit well into the daily routine.

Your child learns at his own pace, exactly like learning to walk and talk.

Allocate enough time for practice and try to avoid distractions from telephone calls, neighbors, and other family members. **Your child will be glad to have your full attention** and will come to treasure this time that belongs fully to him.

The ability to concentrate on one single point at a time is the first and most important step that your child must learn. Anyone who does not learn this will suffer a lifetime under his own capriciousness. Difficult tasks can only be mastered when one fully strives to do so. Examples abound: balancing on a balance beam or cutting with a sharp knife need our undivided attention. The same applies to playing an instrument. **Even when several different things need to be improved, we should avoid trying to fix everything at once**. All young beginners will be overwhelmed and become quickly frustrated if they are expected to concentrate on posture, intonation, bow angle, tone, and expression, all at the same time.

A harmonic musical development requires consequence paired with encouragement. You should follow your intention to open the world of music for your child with the same persistence as you do in other areas, such as cleanliness or adherence to regular meal- and bedtimes. It is a part of life that things do not always run smoothly. But do not give up! It is important to be persistent when pursuing long-term goals.

4. Listening

Your child should listen to the CD every day. In this way, the student will develop an awareness for beautiful tone, clear rhythm, proper intonation, and musical expressiveness from the very beginning. **This ear training is the most important prerequisite for learning new pieces in the first years of lessons**. Always remember the principle of learning to speak. Without being literally bathed in speech, learning the mother tongue would be impossible. And just as with language, your child need not always listen attentively. The CD may be played in the background as he plays, baths, eats, or rides in the car.

5. Learning by Ear

An important characteristic of the Mother-Tongue Method is learning without written music during the beginning phase. As your child plays, training of the ear, concentration on rhythm and intonation, attention to posture and movement patterns, tone, and expression are the central themes. In this way, elementary relationships between hearing, conception, feeling, and playing can flow directly together. From the very beginning, your child experiences music as a

living whole, not as something to be mastered analytically. This strategy can also be observed in the natural learning of speech: first talk, then read.

6. Observation and Imitation

Pre-school children possess a remarkable ability to imitate much of what they see and hear. They rapidly grasp simple songs and can learn the necessary movements for instrumental playing very easily.

7. Encouragement

Don't be stingy with praise, since anyone who has tried to coax beautiful sounds from a violin knows how difficult this is. Suzuki always complimented his students after they played. He explained that, at first, it is the effort that counts and only later the result. His standard sentence was: "Very good, can you... (this or that) even better?" He always stressed that parents should be relaxed and calm while working with their children, since tranquillity and cheerful concentration will be reflected in them. Constructive work can only unfold in an atmosphere that is warm and friendly.

8. Review and Internalization

In the beginning, your child should regularly repeat all previously learned pieces and exercises. Just as in learning to speak, the entire vocabulary and grammar are used, not just the most recently learned words. In this way, your child gradually expands his concentration, memory, and performance abilities, and learning is proceeding simultaneously on three different levels:

1. Solidifying and deepening of skills through repetition and review.
2. Expanding skills through work on the new piece.
3. Preparatory work for upcoming challenges via small exercises and listening to future pieces on the CD.

The repertoire is not only being constantly expanded, it is also being refined and internalized. The consequent improvement of previously learned pieces, paired with preparation for the next musical steps, drives the natural learning processes steadily and automatically forwards.

Suzuki summarized the outcome of this learning process with the short formula: **"Ability breeds further ability!"**

9. The Stimulating Environment

Dear parents, your own relationship to music has a substantial impact on how your child will learn. Can your child sense a sincere interest and enthusiasm for music in you? The creation of a stimulating musical environment will not only benefit your child, it will maximize the learning process.

- ◆ Play music of high quality for your child regularly.
- ◆ Take your child to observe other children often.
- ◆ Accompany your child to student recitals, workshops and concerts.
- ◆ Improvise small home concerts for relatives and friends, or for the other parent who cannot regularly attend lessons.

Your active support is absolutely necessary if you want your child to experience the world of music at an early age. Music will not only enrich your child's life, it will awaken a sense for order, harmony and beauty in everyone involved.

10. Group Lessons

Children learn from each other. To quote Dr. Suzuki, "only one student, one teacher – bad idea!" Dr. Suzuki supplemented the private lesson with group lessons and mutual lesson observation, because he realized the effectiveness of peer learning. As older students become role models that younger students want to imitate, group lessons provide them with a sense of responsibility, contributing to self-esteem. Younger students learn by example from older, more skillful players--sometimes more efficiently than they learn from the teacher!

Group lessons provide a supportive environment for frequent performance practices. Ensemble skills, performance poise and social skills are learned, while collecting positive memories. In weekly group lessons, children come together to make beautiful music in a nurturing environment - a fertile ground for experiencing the joy of music making and for

learning cooperation and a nurturing spirit. The weekly review of familiar repertoire and preview of more advanced pieces in group lessons are strong support for home-practice motivation.

The Suzuki Triangle

The Suzuki method places great value on what we call the “Suzuki Triangle.” This describes the marriage between the teacher, parent, and student. As a young child, more often than not, you as the parent are making a decision for your child by putting them into music lessons. This is not yet their choice, and until they get a hold of their own sound, and reach a level of artistry, they are not capable of taking ownership of their instrument and musical growth just yet. This means two things:

1. You as the parent must be their number one fan, encourager, supporter, and sometimes enforcer, when it comes to practicing.
2. Do your best to be an example of what you expect from your child. **ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS!** For instance, if you tell your child it’s time to practice, and you as the parent, go off to watch tv. Your words, may be saying one thing, but your actions tell the child that at that moment, the tv is more important than spending time with them. Our children will follow our example, and it’s important to remember that you are the role model at home they take after.

Parent’s Role in the lesson vs At home

Parents are called to be active observers during the lessons. Your child will be occupied with me during the lesson, so it is up to you to take notes, write down assignments, goals, things your child has done well, and things your child could work on. I will provide each student with practice assignments based off of their own individual needs. Please also bring recording materials to record practice videos at the appropriate time. Aside from this time, all technology must be shut off or on silent. Your child’s success depends on it. During lessons it is not your job to be the teacher. That’s what you are paying me to do.

With that said, there is a time for you to be the teacher... that role is fulfilled at home. I will only see your child once or twice a week. Children ages 5-10 years old are not yet capable of being self-disciplined enough to hold themselves accountable to practice everyday. It is your job as the parent to not only establish a time **EVERY DAY** to practice, but to be the teacher, and guide your child in what to do and how to practice the assignments and tasks given to them each week. Remember, you have notes and recordings that you will be making in each lesson. You are your child’s best resource outside of the studio.

The #1 rule

Never say the words “go practice,” or “go there,” or “go” anything. Always say “come here” “come show me what you can do...” If you want someone to love something that you love, or share an experience you want them to have, it’s important that they be invited to that experience and not sent. This is especially true for your child.

Believe it or not, your child does value quality time with their parents. Learning the violin together can enrich your family life and relationship greatly. Music is not meant to be a lonely experience. It is meant to be shared, expressed, and can be a vehicle used to build bridges, create community, and speak to our hearts and minds in a real and genuine way.

What happens when my child does not want to practice?

Good question! The Suzuki approach is all about teaching the whole child, and is about so much more than just the music. Dr. Suzuki himself said, **“Teaching music is not my main purpose. I want to make good citizens. If children hear fine music from the day of their birth and learn to play it, they develop sensitivity, discipline and endurance. They get a beautiful heart.”- Shinichi Suzuki**

As a Suzuki student, your child is on the path to acquiring skills that will not only help them grow in their musical ability, but also, if taken seriously, help them to discover their unlimited potential and develop into well-rounded, sensitive human beings.

Growth, however, does not always come easily. Sometimes we must work through difficulties in order to achieve something greater than ourselves. The violin is one of the most difficult instruments to learn to play in the world. That's what makes it so special when someone can play it well!

Having a vision vs an expectation

In order to achieve growth we must first have a vision. Ask yourself, what is the vision you have for your child? What qualities or characteristics do you hope to see grow in them by studying music? Where do you see them next week, next year, in ten years?...

If we have a vision, then all of the ground work.... the fun times, the happy times, and the even harder times, are ultimately experiences that lead us closer to unlocking your child's unlimited potential.

Avoid having expectations. Often we can find ourselves caught up in what piece our child is going to play next. Let me explain to you, that teaching repertoire does not necessarily make a child a good violinist. Teaching them skills, however, does produce musical sensitivity and artistry, and will result in your child becoming a talented and well versed musician.

The focus in my school will be to teach the skills and use the repertoire; not the other way around. I am interested in creating music and helping students reach their fullest potential. This does not happen overnight. When we have a vision, however, the notion of expectation is easily overshadowed.

As a Suzuki teacher, I aim to have a vision for each of my students, and it is my mission to always teach to that vision.

Don't miss an opportunity to celebrate!

You don't have to wait until your child is playing Mendelsohn to give them praise. Big steps and baby steps are all progress. When your child does something right, make sure they know it. There's nothing more frustrating for a child than to feel like they are being punished or scolded for not meeting expectations. We must measure growth not by the repertoire they are playing in the beginning, but by the skills they are steadily developing over time. All of this is key to playing the violin with grace and artistry. My goal is to lead each student to finding their own sound and their own individual voice on their instrument. If they are nurtured by love and encouragement, the result will be magnificent.

The beginning is like planting a seed in the ground. At first you see nothing. For a long time you might not see anything. Yet, a multitude of growth is happening underground. One day you see a sprout, then a stem, a bud, and eventually a fully bloomed flower. There is no rushing this process. It happens organically and in its own time. If you wish for your child to truly reach a level of artistry and to have a love for music, it is important that you nurture them into blossoming; and avoid at all costs, the desire to rush them to a certain point they might not be ready for at that moment in their journey.

The Million Dollar Lesson

This is the lesson where a student tests the limits of how far he/she can go. This will be the day that cooperation is at its lowest point, and the student refuses to respond to the direction of both the teacher and the parent, and is throwing a tantrum. It is normal for very young children to test the limits of their environment. It is just the way they figure out where their place is in everything. What we won't do, is beg the child for cooperation in this instance. If we resort to begging, then the child now sees that they have the power to control who's boss in the lesson time, and this is not acceptable.

When this happens, it's important that as the adults in the room, things remain calm. This is the lesson where the child is escorted out by the parent, and taken directly home without a word.

Without scolding them, it is best that the parent communicates to the student at a later time at home, and in a calm manner, that this kind of behavior is not acceptable. Often, the child just needs to know their limits and this sort of lesson does not happen again.

If the "million dollar lesson" happens more than twice at the most, then the parent and I may have a talk about whether or not the child is ready for a music lessons program like this.

Not every child will have a Million Dollar Lesson, but if it does happen, we will be on the same page on how to handle this situation with care. Remember, we must always be working towards teaching the child to a vision. Nurturing the child to growth is held at the highest priority. Sometimes growth means a bit of struggle, and it is our job as parents and teachers to make sure we guide our children and show them how work through moments of struggle in a productive and meaningful way.

Learning to play violin may not be the easiest thing in the world. In fact, most people don't play the violin, and that's what makes it so special. Know that all of the hard work, however, is worth every minute. A Suzuki student may become open to learning many life skills through their training.

Listening

Discipline

Dealing with criticism

Negotiation

Patience

Coping with obstacles

A healthy relationship with struggle

Working with others

Time management

Managing priorities with values

Gracefulness

Self-awareness

Respect

Placing value on delayed gratification

Building focus and concentration

Confidence

Self esteem

Perseverance

Fine motor control

Self-expression

Performance skills and stage presence

Poise

Group speaking

Coordination

Problem solving

Compassion

Goal setting

Responsibility

Memorization

Intelligence

Realizing ones potential

A sense of perfecting each step and understanding that there are steps to achieving a goal

An appreciation of music

Family communication

Developing one's own individual voice on their instrument

Creativity

Interpretation of a symbolic language

Here are some ways to help your child succeed in music lessons:

1. **Make a long term commitment.** Studies show this is more important than any other factor in music students long term success.
2. **Believe they CAN do it.** Suzuki teacher Alice Joy Lewis says that families she sees be successful are the ones that believe their child absolutely CAN learn to play well.
3. **Find the best teacher you can.** A good teacher will help coach you through the rough patches and has the tools to help you turn things around when it's feeling hard.
4. **Buy or rent the best instrument you can afford.** Playing on a bad instrument is like trying to run in bad shoes. If it's really hard to make a beautiful sound, playing the instrument is not that motivating!

5. **Find out what motivates your child and do that thing.** When your child gains more skills on the instrument the music they learn will be their motivation. At first they need help to want to practice. Figure out what motivates them and do that thing **a lot**
6. **Be Encouraging.** Don't point out the 10 things your child is doing wrong. They likely know they are not Joshua Bell yet, encourage them with something they are doing well. Even if that thing is simply how hard they are working or concentrating. Children do more of what we praise – use that to your advantage.
7. **Help Build ownership.** If practice = an adult tells me what to do, children tend to dislike it. Coach them through practice while also letting them feel like they are making some decisions. Ask questions. Give them two acceptable choices of what to practice next. Let practice become something that is for them.
8. **Find time in each day's schedule for your child to practice.** Children are not good at time management. They will need your help to find time to practice.
9. **Don't give up!** Sometimes it's really hard. Sometimes our kids fight us on practice. Don't give up. This is really normal. Your child can do it (see #2)
10. **Go to live concerts.** Seeing performers play music live is so motivating! Many communities have free or inexpensive events to attend if you seek them out. Ask your teacher for recommendations.
11. **Connect your child to a social outlet for their music.** Working on something hard, alone in a practice room is not the point of music. Play with and for other students. Join an orchestra when your child is ready. Attend a group class or simply invite a friend over who plays an instrument for a musical play date.
12. **Be your child's biggest fan.** We cheer when toddlers learn to walk (even though they hobble around and fall all the time). Cheer on any and all progress. Make sure your child knows you are their biggest fan no matter what.
13. **Make listening to music part of your family culture.** When children are surrounded by music in their lives they are much more successful. Just like when we are learning a language immersion is the best way to pick it up quickly.
14. **Connect to other parents.** Whether it's in online groups, other parents in your studio or a friend whose child also studies music – connecting with other parents on the same journey can make us feel less alone and we can learn from each other what works best.
15. **Do something every day.** Literally everyday. Play something, listen to music. What we do daily becomes part of who we are. What we do once in a while can be hard to follow through on. A daily habit makes a huge difference.

<http://www.suzukitriangle.com/tag/suzuki-method/>