

# 5 WAYS TO GET THE MOST OUT OF MUSIC LESSONS

These guidelines will help you to have a successful and rewarding experience learning any instrument.

## 1. HOW YOUNG IS TOO YOUNG - STARTING AT THE RIGHT AGE

**ADULTS** can start any instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing an adult is to commit to practicing. We teach many beginner students in their 60's and 70's.

**CHILDREN** starting *at the right age is a key element to the success of their lessons*. Some people will tell you "the sooner the better" but this attitude can actually backfire and be a negative. If a child is put into lessons too soon they may feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off music just because they had one unpleasant experience which could have been prevented. Sometimes if the child waits a year to start lessons their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

### 3 - 4 Years Old

If a pre-schooler has a keen desire and wants to start music, a group preschool music class will give them a good foundation in music basics which will be helpful in later private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work as the child has not yet experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or school and learns more effectively through the game oriented preschool environment. At Charlotte Music School we do offer a trial month for children turning 5 years old who are interested in piano lessons. At the end of the first month, an evaluation is given to the parent detailing the child's development. At that time, the parent/teacher can decide to continue in private lessons or register for group pre-school music class.

### Piano/Keyboard

At our school 5 years old is the youngest age that we start children in private piano lessons. At this age they have begun to develop longer attention spans and can retain material with ease.

### Guitar - Acoustic, Electric and Bass

7-8 years old is the earliest we recommend for guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips from pressing on the strings. Children under 8 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years old and older.

### Voice Lessons

9-10 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of the vocal chords, and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. At Charlotte Music School, for children younger than 10, we have a **Children's Choir** (ages 6-9) and a **Preschool Singing Program** (ages 3-5) that teaches them how to use their voices properly, in a fun, relaxed environment.

### Drums

The average age of our youngest drum student is 8. This varies greatly depending on the size of the child. They have to be able to reach both the pedals and the cymbals. We also provide a Pre-Beginner group lesson using drum pads for children 5-8 years old. This way they can still learn rhythm while preparing for Beginners' Drum Lessons.

### Flute, Clarinet & Saxophone

Due to lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone the size of the instrument), we recommend that most woodwind beginners are 8-9 years and older.

## **Violin**

We accept violin students from the age of 5. Some teachers will start children as young as 3, but experience has shown us the most productive learning occurs when the beginner is 5 or older.

## **Trumpet**

The trumpet requires physical exertion and lung power. 9 years and older is a good time to start the trumpet.

## **2. INSIST ON PRIVATE LESSONS WHEN LEARNING A SPECIFIC INSTRUMENT**

Group classes work well for preschool music programs, and theory lessons. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are far superior since in private lessons it is hard to miss anything, and each student can learn at their own pace. This means the teacher does not have to teach a class at a “middle of the road” level, but has the time and focus to work on the individual student’s strengths and weaknesses. For that lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The teachers also enjoy this as they can help the student be the best they can be instead of dividing their attention to many kids at once.

## **3. TAKE LESSONS IN A PROFESSIONAL TEACHING ENVIRONMENT**

Learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, *but also having an environment that is focused on music education.* In a professional school environment a student cannot be distracted by the TV, pets, ringing phones, siblings, or anything else, like they would in the teacher’s or student’s home. With only 45 minutes to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music.

Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers who are at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments and programs. In a music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or sideline for the teacher but a responsibility which is taken very seriously. Besides, in our school, we have more than one teacher per instrument, which means we can select the best teacher to fit each student’s needs for a higher success rate. We can also schedule a family of 3 siblings at the same time with different teachers, avoiding the parent a long wait at the school, or having to drive around town to make each different music lesson. We are one location to serve all family members.

## **4. MAKE PRACTICING EASIER**

As with anything, improving in music takes practice. One of the main problems with music lessons is the drudgery of practicing and the fight between parents and students to practice every day. Here are some ways to make practicing easier:

### **Time**

Set the same time every day to practice so it becomes part of a routine or habit. This works particularly well for children. Generally, the earlier in the day the practicing can occur, the less reminding required by the parents to get the child to practice.

### **Repetition**

We use this method quite often when setting practice schedules for beginners. For a young child 20 or 30 minutes seems like an eternity. Instead of setting a time frame, we use repetition. For example, practice this piece 4 times every day, and this scale 5 times a day. The child then does not pay attention to the amount of time they are practicing their instrument, but knows if they are on repetition number 3 they are almost finished.

### **Rewards**

This works very well for both children and adult students. Some adults reward themselves with a cappuccino after a successful week of practicing. Parents can encourage children to practice by granting

them occasional rewards for successful practicing. In our school we reward young children for a successful week of practicing with stars and stickers on their work. Praise tends to be the most coveted award - there just is no substitute for a pat on the back for a job well done. Sometimes we all have a week with little practicing, in that case there is always next week. For more information on practice and to receive a Practice tracker, please ask the front desk at the School.

## **5. USE RECOGNIZED TEACHING MATERIALS**

There are some excellent materials developed by professional music educators that are made for students in a variety of situations. For example in piano, there are books for very young beginners, and books for adult students that have never played before. There are books that can start you at a level you are comfortable with. These materials have been researched and are continually upgraded and improved to make learning easier. These materials ensure that no important part of learning the instrument can inadvertently be left out. If you ever have to move to a different part of the country, qualified teachers and institutions will recognize the materials and be able to smoothly continue from where the previous teacher left off.

**Most Importantly . . .**

**HAVE FUN!!**

Music should be something that you enjoy for a lifetime no matter what age or level you are. So, try not to put unrealistic expectations on yourself or your children to learn too quickly. Everyone learns at a different pace and the key is to be able to enjoy the journey. At Charlotte Music School we believe that music is innate to every person, whether you are 5 years old or 95 years old, and as a unique school we enjoy being part of the process of discovering this gift.

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