

Tips for helping your piano student(s) do well

By Sarah Gorham

1. Offer lots of encouragement! Tell them they're great, and tell them they're great often. Ask them to play for company, ask them to bring their books to grandma's/cousins'/friends' houses and play something there. Don't nag them or discourage them or express disappointment at how slowly they're progressing. Achieving basic competency at the piano is a difficult endeavor- this is why people study piano year after year in private one-on-one lessons. Do not expect too much too soon. *Encouragement Only*, please.

2. There are some things you can do to make it easy and inviting for students to sit down at the piano and play.....

> Keep your piano in tune and in good repair. A good piano, properly maintained, can actually increase in value. Broken keys, poor tuning, a non-working pedal, etc., can be discouraging. Letting a piano go years without being tuned can destroy your instrument. My piano tuner charges less when a piano is tuned regularly, that is, at least twice a year, because that makes his job easier. Recommended piano tuners:

Steve Krueger 828 1137

John Cervin 829 4485

> Keep the piano and piano bench clear of clutter. A cluttered bench means the piano is less likely to get played. Be sure the bench is sturdy and at the correct height. Use a pad and/or a foot stool for very young students. Get a good piano lamp, make the piano a pleasant place to be.

> When you and your student arrive home after a lesson, make it a habit that the books used in the lesson are immediately returned to the piano, and possibly even left open to a particular page in that week's lesson. Again, what I'm getting at here is making it *easy* and *attractive* to sit for 5 or 10 or 30 minutes and practice. Do not leave your piano books in the car. Having to retrieve and dig around for books is another hurdle you can easily avoid. Five or ten minutes of practice, several times a week, is fine for a beginner.

3. Use a tote bag or brief case or some such thing to convey books back and forth between your home and the piano teacher's. Using Post-It notes for assignments is okay, but **I would prefer that each student bring a dedicated notebook for me to write in each week.** Keep the notebook with the books in the tote bag- this helps a lot.

4. It helps if the student sits down to practice soon after getting home from a lesson, hopefully that same evening. This should help them to better remember what we talked about at their lesson.

5. Don't assume that an assignment to repeat a lesson or pieces means they're not doing well. Sometimes it can help to play a piece over several weeks or even months. As students progress to more complex music, expect them to spend longer on individual

assignments. Sometimes we will go back to the beginning of a book and play the whole thing through again- students are often pleased with how much easier things can be the second time around.

6. I do not think it's a good idea to rush a student through the levels too quickly. Finishing the Alfred Lesson book Level 2, for example, does not necessarily mean that the student is ready for Level 3 Alfred. There's a world of music out there at every level, and spending a longer time mastering a certain level, rather than rushing on to the next, can have great results.

7. If you're at the music store looking for books for your student, do not be misled by the label "Easy Piano". Easy Piano is the equivalent to Level 3 or 4 in lesson books and can easily take five years to achieve! The basic Levels of the Alfred and Faber books are a good guide. Some of the offerings from these publishers are: *Lesson, Theory, Technic, Notespeller, Top Hits, Favorites, Rock & Roll, Classics, Duets, Hymns, Popular, Jazz & Blues, Christmas, Composition, Sight Reading, Children's Songs* and *Recital*. Bridge of Harmony, in downtown Brainerd on 7th Street between Front and Laurel, carries many of these books in their store. Going to the music store to pick out new books should be a fun experience for your student. Watch the appropriate Levels and let them choose what looks interesting to them, in addition to the required books.

Please note that when I have books here for you to buy, I am not making a profit on the sales. These are provided as a convenience to you. If the books cost too much, let me know and I can sometimes lend out used copies. I realize that some families have plenty of money for piano books and some do not.

8. If your child starts talking about quitting piano lessons, and you'd like them to continue studying, there are a few things to try. First of all, talk to me and let me know the situation. I can try different tactics, styles, books, etc., to try and retain their interest. Each student is like a puzzle for me as I try to find the hook that motivates them to learn to play music. You may wish to consider a change in teachers: someone with a different style or different approach than me may be able to keep them in lessons.

9. In addition to piano lessons, it is great to encourage the many other musical opportunities available: school choirs and bands, orchestra, garage bands, church music, dance lessons, etc. Piano will help with all of these, by the way, as we learn the basic rudiments of music that can be applied to other instruments and voice. When a child turns twelve, put a guitar in their hands and see what happens. If they are students in the Brainerd school district, tell them about the high school band and choir trips to California, New York and Hawaii. There is a world of music out there for people to explore. Encouragement!

Sarah Gorham, *offering piano lessons since 1998*