

Who Actually Quits Musical Instrument Instruction — Children or Their Parents?

Posted on 10/14/2015 Written by TONY 44 COMMENTS



How many times have we heard from adults that they wish their parents didn't allow them to quit their musical instrument when they were younger?

There comes a time in a large percentage of music students' lives when they want to quit their instrument – and more often than not, parents allow them to do it. But is the child quitting ... or is the parent?

I remember wanting to quit the trombone when I was in middle school. Honestly, it's hard to remember why. It could have been peer pressure,

boredom, or something else – but I had my mind made up. I shudder to think of what my life would be like now if my mother had decided to quit as well and give in to my pleas.

Ultimately, it is important to understand that when it comes to music education and other transformative activities that require some grit in order to succeed, most children go through a period of time where *they must succeed despite themselves*. They must be encouraged and supported through the tough times, not given a pass. It is only at a certain point that children – and parents – can make an informed decision to quit their musical instrument, and that point is usually *much later*, not sooner, than one may think.

Here are a few ways that parents are the ones that quit music instruction, and some thoughts on overcoming the tough times with our children that are bound to occur:

“I can't bug my child to do one more thing”. I have heard this line so many times as a teacher and administrator. A parent tells the teacher that their child will be discontinuing music because they haven't had any luck getting their child to practice, and the *“child doesn't want to play anymore.”* In addition, the parent says the child “seems to be over-scheduled and is overwhelmed with the demanding school curriculum.”

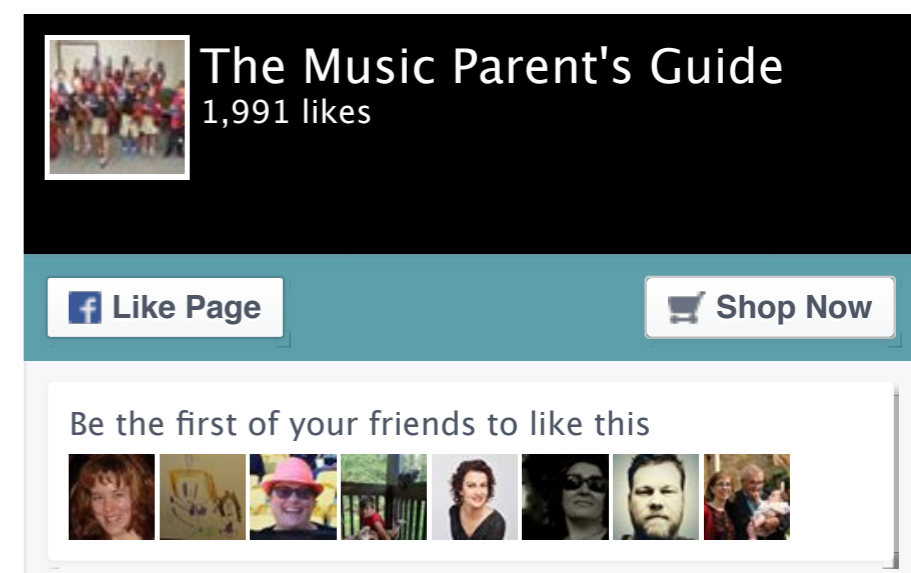
This parent has clearly given up.

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There are many things that children need to do that they do not want to do. They don't want to bathe, do homework, brush their teeth, or do their chores oftentimes. But we as adults understand that we would be teaching them to be irresponsible if we gave in. We also understand that children are not old or mature enough to make many life decisions – but when it comes to quitting music instruction the rules somehow seem to change. The truth is that we *can* insist our child do “one more thing,” and if that's really not humanly possible, a curricular activity such as music should not be at the bottom of that list.

Parents have overcommitted their child. Our children are growing up in a time where the U.S. has turned into a society of “overachievers”. Downtime or activities that are [perceived to be “fun”](#) (i.e. music and the arts) are considered wasted time because concrete results are not being measured and money (and a job) is not at the end of the equation. Children have so many choices of ways to “enrich” their lives that quitting has become an easy response to frustration or boredom. Most adults regret many of the things in life that they quit, especially because they could have had stuck it out, reached a good level of proficiency and found that enjoyment that seemed to elude them earlier. Parents need to remember this fact and encourage their children to stick with music instruction for at least two years, if not through middle school.

Parents must remember what their goals for their child's education is. Perseverance, commitment, loyalty, and grit are all values I hope that I – and my schools – instill in my children. Learning to endure something even when it temporarily becomes boring or unpleasant or when the teacher isn't the most engaging person in the world is a lesson truly worth teaching. I would argue that the time you let your child walk away from something just because at that moment it doesn't suit them is the last time you may have any credibility with them about endurance or resilience ever again.

Parents, teachers and students have a misguided view of passion. Parents often talk about helping kids find their passions. When parents allow their children to quit music, we often hear excuses such as, “Music is not where my child's passion lies, it seems.” But most of the time, passions do not always appear out of nowhere; they are often a result of hard work and dedication – the happiness that comes from doing something well over a period of time. I have spent most of my life reaping the rewards of a life devoted to music, yet in 7th grade I was begging to quit. And there are thousands upon thousands of other children who were not allowed to quit who have gone on to rewarding lives in many fields that would never have been possible if not for their musical education.

Parents need to embrace the struggle that their children are facing. The reward of performing a piece of music after overcoming obstacles during practice is a great vehicle for parents to teach their children that true growth occurs when we struggle a bit. Learning to deal with struggle yields some of the greatest benefits imaginable over time when applied to other areas of life. But a child's struggle is a parents struggle as well, of course. There are bad days – and some really frustrating days. There may be tantrums and miserable practices and screaming scenes where you may feel as if you are at the end of your rope. But if you stick with it, your children will have long, enduring relationships with instructors and classmates who will change and enrich their lives. Don't forget to reach out to your child's teacher for extra help during these challenging times – I promise you that they will pass.

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Your child's experience with their music studies will shape their adult lives more than you will ever know. They will be different people in the best way imaginable – people who would be far poorer intellectually without music in their life. Let's not kid ourselves – children quit things all the time. Sometimes it's even the right thing to do, but sometimes they are simply bored or don't like the teacher or would just rather do nothing at home – and that is not acceptable or in their best interest over the long-term. Deciding when to let your child quit is a difficult problem that never goes away, but it is safe to say that one year is simply not enough time *for anyone* to decide whether to stay with musical instrument instruction or not.

Maybe you didn't study music. Maybe you quit prematurely and you didn't even realize it – but the road is open to your children, so steer them down it. They will never tell you later in life that they are angry at you for *not* letting them quit.

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Comments



Zane Meek says:

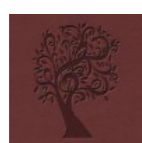
10/14/2015 at 9:46 am

Anthony,

I have actually spent a lot of time lately thinking about this subject. In the district in which I teach, we start about 120 kids every year in 5th grade. By 6th grade (our elementaries are K-6), we're down around 100. In the switch to middle school (a 7-8 setup)? Now we're down to around 50 in 7th. 5th and 6th grade band are only held twice a week; that's less than a year's worth of instruction in two year's time. Parents don't even give it a chance to take hold before they say, "They want to try something else" or, "They just don't seem to be any good at it" or, "We don't want to force them to do it."

The question becomes, "How do we get parents to not let their kid quit?" What systems do we put in place to help kids succeed and hold both they and their parents accountable for learning so that they see it as important and relevant? I have my own ideas (many of which I have borrowed from music educators and programs far more successful than I) about at least some of what we can do but I'd like to hear what you have to say about it.

REPLY



Tony says:

10/14/2015 at 1:58 pm

Thanks for the great questions, Zane! Although I have answered these questions here and there throughout my previous posts, here are some ideas: First, a culture needs to be created from the bottom up about the value of the music program. This is done by the teacher educating the students, the parents, fellow non-music teachers, the administration, and the community at large about the importance of music in the school curricula. The parents must understand how, exactly, they can help their child succeed in the early stages of instruction so the child can experience success. The middle school music directors (and

students) need to consistently come visit the younger ages and perform/mentor them. We need to dispel the myth of natural talent and gifts. The list goes on and on...

REPLY

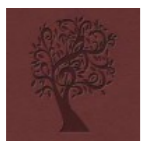


Steve says:

10/14/2015 at 11:05 am

These observations are both short sighted and without merit. You describe yourself as wanting to quit playing the trombone in the 7th grade. Was this because of your ability, being bullied, or some other pre-teen melodramatic reasoning? I know you describe your position as being a large percentage that want to quit, but you fail to describe that many of those possibly didn't want to start to begin with. The problem with today's arts in school, in my humble opinion, is the fact that it is forced upon people. Especially when it is done year after unwavering year. My parents wanted me to try band out for one year, and then after that I could quit if I wanted to. Did I want to? Yes. Did they let me quit? No. Do I appreciate band and learn more because they made me stay in it for 3 long years? No. I learned what the director made me so that I could pass the class, nothing more. I only played and practiced in class, and I still got better. So hear this, my ability is not what made me want to quit. I wasn't overbooked, so the stress of it didn't make me want to quit. My passion was slowly turning into hating playing in the band band, so being confused as to what my passion was didn't make me want to quit. My wanting to quit made me want to quit. If I was forced to practice more, I would have hated it more. If I was forced to stay in the band into High School I would have continued to have been a cancer in the band program. You said "The truth is that we can insist our child do "one more thing," and if that's really not humanly possible, a curricular activity such as music should not be at the bottom of that list." Tell me exactly why band shouldn't be at the bottom in some cases? Why should I have given up on the sports I also played before giving up on band? Would you rather I lost the leadership experience I gained by playing sports, or learning to live with the disappointment of losing offset by the joy of winning. Someone's score (their opinion, and by the way I thought art was supposed to be subjective and not score able?) in band competitions was never going to give me the satisfaction of achieving greatness or humility when it is earned by either my or my team's ability to be better or worse than another team on that day. Your attempt to save the music will fall on deaf ears when it comes to kids that you want to force to be in the band. Please focus on kids that actually want to participate. And for all those kids out there that are like me and whose parents are reading your blog post right now I sarcastically say "Thank you for telling my parents to not let me quit, I am sooo glad someone else is telling them what is best for me!"

REPLY



Tony says:

10/14/2015 at 2:10 pm

An interesting point of view, Steve. But before we get into a conversation that I clearly will not change your mind on (based on your tone) let me ask this: If arts is "forced upon people" in schools – is math, science, english and physical education forced upon them as well?

As far as you and sports is concerned, it is clear that you were meant to be doing that (sports is extra-curricular, by the way, not curricular – it was not an either/or proposition). But the point of this article is that "kids who want to participate" cannot be determined, most times, in one year. Most students WANT to start studying an instrument, and then their interest wanes for many reasons – least of which is "they weren't meant to play an instrument". That is the thrust of this blog.

Thanks for your sarcasm. If you read my last paragraph, I clearly stated that

sometimes quitting is what is called for. I'm glad you figured that out for yourself and sorry your parents did not. I hope you will forgive them.

REPLY



Steve says:

10/14/2015 at 2:59 pm

Tony,

I'm pretty sure you did not so clearly state that in your last paragraph. Even so I do agree with holding kids accountable to sticking things out when they try new things, but you must also discuss the repercussions in doing so as well. You did not specify that these kids started out WANTing to play, you spoke about them starting to play and WANTing to quit.

You called sports an extra curricular activity? I submit that music could be viewed as the same. Others say that music helps contribute to better grades in school... well sports was my outlet to opening my abilities in the classroom, and once again music education was a negative aspect. Yes, my brain might react positively when I hear music, but it shuts down when I play it (another response for another blog perhaps).

Also to your point, yes, those other classes are forced upon everyone, and no they shouldn't be. As a thought, I probably would have been better off in hands off classes such as woodshop (specific math), physical ed, Architecture (teach specific math), specialized engineering classes (once again specific math and science skills), but those types of classes are either not offered or never encouraged. Sometimes money used for those classes can be passed off to other programs such as music classes. I'm not saying music isn't a positive for many kids, just please be ok if it's a positive for "some".

And speaking for myself on keeping the arts in schools by people (I am not saying this is verbiage you have used, just that it is affecting how others see the arts) saying that kids in music education are smarter... ding ding, that means everyone else is dumber than you. Thank you for calling me dumb. No help for you! (just a little word from the other side). I will support my kids if they choose to play music, but nothing will be forced, even if they want to quit. (but they must find a replacement activity so they are not sitting at home on their phones or gaming systems either). Thanks for letting me rant on lots of random issues.

REPLY



Phil says:

10/17/2015 at 8:27 am

I work in the music products industry, I'm the one receiving all the rental instruments be returned by quitting families. In this day in age, parents seem to be afraid of upsetting or disagreeing with their children. They constantly wish to please, no matter what the long term cost.

Some students don't have the initiative to attempt anything new or are chronic quitters and need to be either pushed into or through things. My brother was the latter. If he had his way, would have sat at home and done nothing. There was a year that he attempted to quit nearly every non-required activity: scouts, sports, music, etc. They challenged him to honor his commitments for the year and then reevaluated over the summer. They would not permit him to quit everything. However, music DID end up getting cut, but not the sport he wanted to quit initially. He ended finding a real love for sport up nearly making it to

state as a competitive swimmer, something that would not have happened if he'd given up mid-year when faced with a struggle.

While music was not the winner in this particular situation he still looks on those years fondly and appreciates my parents part in helping him discover who he really was.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/17/2015 at 8:58 am

Very well said, Phil. The concept can be applied to any activity that kids quit, for sure – we need to be careful about not letting our children struggle a bit. Some of my friends who own music stores tell me around 80% of their stock comes back after one year of study. What percentage that you experience return?

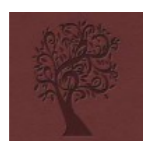
REPLY



Kristin says:
10/15/2015 at 6:03 pm

As a child, I was one of those kids who had piano forced upon me and I'm one of (apparently) the few adults who is so happy my parents finally allowed me to quit. My parents made me play and practice for 4 years and I hated every single minute. Now, on the bright side, I learned to read music and that helped me a lot when I later chose to play the clarinet. I also loved the sports I chose to play. I am not saying that the 4-years I played piano was all futile, but what would have happened had my parents instead encouraged me in my areas of actual interest?

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 6:40 pm

I think your parents realized that there was some value in the 4 years you studied, and it is also obvious that they knew when to say when. Sorry you hated “every minute” – there must have been some factors (teacher, wrong instrument, etc) that really were playing against you to make you feel that way.

REPLY



Rose says:
10/14/2015 at 11:36 am

Thanks for this article. You've made so many good points. I see it in my students and their families frequently. The ones who persevere and continue with lessons are better for it. The ones who don't often come back to me and tell me they wished they had continued on.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/14/2015 at 2:10 pm

Thanks for the comment, Rose! Yes, most regret it, for sure. Let's work on keeping them going.

REPLY



Elizabeth Erickson says:
10/14/2015 at 12:18 pm

The above reader has some valid points. Clearly, there are cases where it is best to quit and hope the student develops a love of listening to all kinds of great music that will offer a lifetime of enjoyment. I don't have an answer that fits every situation. I can say that in the 43 years I've been teaching privately, more times than not, parents let their kids quit way too soon; let their kids who are too young to see the big picture, decide without involving the teacher; and do over schedule their children. Presently, I have an incredible group of kids and parents in my studio, but I've seen it all.

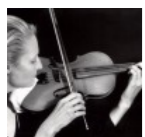
REPLY



Tony says:
10/14/2015 at 2:12 pm

Of course, sometimes it is best to quit. I'm not naive enough to think otherwise. However, when up to 50% of kids quit playing after one year, it is not because "they are not meant to" have music instruction in their lives.

REPLY



Cynthia Faisst says:
10/14/2015 at 7:16 pm

Starting children as preschoolers when they can bond with the musical experience on their first instrument instead of making them wait until they are older when learning is more difficult makes a difference. We would never ask children to start learning their first language in 4th grade. The frustration of learning any language at that age would result in the same kind of frustration we put children and parents through in music? Even children with special needs can become remarkable musicians.

Preschool and early childhood is a time when children form their strongest emotional relationships. They love repetition, perhaps more than their parents and have lots of time to learn habits and tolerate being amateurs. There is no need to rush the learning process as seems to be the case in our academic institutions.

If children are born processing language as music, we need to invest in their continued exposure to music, throughout early childhood for the purpose of making their access to all other learning less frustrating and more rewarding. Music opens the door way to an inspiration for education.

We have to stop this backward thinking that learning music is a privilege and start recognizing it as a human right and necessity which our educational institutions and economies of scale depend on for nurturing the problem solvers of the future.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/14/2015 at 7:40 pm

Cynthia, I could not have said this better if I tried. Thank you.

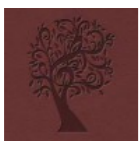
REPLY



Melissa Hoile says:
10/14/2015 at 9:38 pm

The thing that always surprises me are the parents who repeatedly say in front of the student "I've told him/ her if you don't practice/not committed you'll have to give up". I feel it plants the idea that giving up is a likely outcome that wasn't in the child's mind to start. Who takes up a new activity with the belief they will probably soon quit? I love my parents who support practice instead of demanding it and support the journey of learning with me and their child. Those parents don't push but they also don't inadvertently encourage the child to quit

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 12:30 pm

If the parents concentrate more on the life skills that their children need to have in order to cultivate some grit instead of putting the cart before the horse, this will keep happening. Great comment.

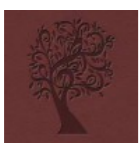
REPLY



Kathy says:
10/15/2015 at 3:40 am

As for these adults angry at their parents for letting them quit too soon, as I enter into middle age I come across more adults picking up their instruments again. Health permitting, one has a whole lifetime in which to play an instrument. After 30 years of clarinet, I'm now playing baroque recorder

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 12:29 pm

Enjoy that recorder! There are some adults who are mad at their helicopter parents – and often for good reason. But they are the exception, not the rule.

REPLY



Andrew Smith says:
10/15/2015 at 8:00 am

After 29 years of teaching, a word from parents of beginning students that I dread hearing is their intention to let their children "try" an instrument. I've found that approach/word has a high correlation with students soon dropping out of the program.

Parents with a long term vision of their son or daughter playing will usually find much better success.

Excellent article and insights.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 12:28 pm

It's true Andrew: students and parents who commit long-term to anything before they begin will be more successful. "Trying" insinuates a half-assed approach, for lack of a better term.

REPLY

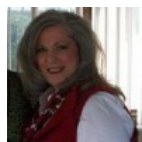


Bill Alpert says:
10/17/2015 at 5:28 pm

Uh huh. "Try" is my red flag word for new families. Or even "My daughter loves the sound of the violin, so I thought we'd try lessons." Also when the first and only question is "how much are lessons." Once had a parent say: "I'd like to come every other week, because I'd like my child to have a wide range of experiences."

Bill Alpert recently posted...[Featured Student: Jaime Martinez](#) ❤️

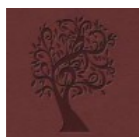
REPLY



Cheryl Edwards Ludwig says:
10/15/2015 at 12:04 pm

Thank you for your insight on this issue. I have taught and played professionally for 30 years and have heard/seen every scenario related to what you are saying in your post. People tell me constantly that they wish their parents would not have allowed them to stop playing a certain instrument and that they regret their decision. It is uncanny to me that I have never heard one person ever say to me that they wish their parents wouldn't have allowed them to stop a sport. We should not pit sports against the arts, ever, but what I said was merely an observation about what people value later in life as they grow, mature and become parents themselves. Personally, I loved playing basketball when I was in elementary and Jr. High school, but an injury left me with no choice but to stop. I was already in music and headed toward success in this area, but to this day, I do not mourn basketball. So, back to the real topic at hand. I completely agree that it takes great support and care by the instructor to help the parents through these tough times when the student is struggling. I see it as part of my job to equip them with the skills of encouraging their student to practice, to build skill-upon-skill, and to create great practice time management skills, as well. Parents are relying on us to educate and share with them what really works in these areas. We can't be passive about these things and expect that the student will never have struggles and want to stop playing. Be a pro-active teacher.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 12:27 pm

Thanks for the comment, Cheryl! Teachers need to guide everyone around them – it is true that it takes a community to cultivate great young musicians/people.

REPLY



Julie Cleveland says:
10/15/2015 at 2:12 pm

Great post.

I've been a piano teacher for nearly 28 years. I agree with Andrew above about the "try" bit—a red flag for me not taking them into my studio.

When kids want to quit, or when the parents report this to me, what a tough time they're having, in addition to changing course a bit to get them through rough patches, I suggest they tell their kids the following:

"Find me three adults who all say 'I'm so glad my mom/dad let me quit piano when I was a kid!' and they you can quit." 😊

Julie Cleveland recently posted...[The gifts we get from our students...](#) ❤️

REPLY



Tonia says:
10/15/2015 at 6:01 pm

My son 7th grade wants to quit trumpet and mostly will not practice – my husband says I push him too much – what wanting him to practice 20 minutes 4 days a week is pushing!!! He doesn't practice but he can spend time on his chrome book the school supplies and last two years it was a I pad the school supplied. Ugh I do not want him to quit .

My daughter plays violin second year getting hard she gets frustrated practicing and now wants to quit

REPLY



Tony says:
10/15/2015 at 6:39 pm

I am sorry this is happening, but I am a professional musician and it is happening with my kids. I suggest you simply insist your son spend time on it every night for 10 minutes and see what happens – get him some fun music to work on, or bring friends over to play. Be sure to tell your son's teacher what is going on, of course. As for your daughter, she may be attempting things that may be too beyond her comfort zone. Again, ask the teacher for some prescriptive advice and push gently while you also support. Good luck!

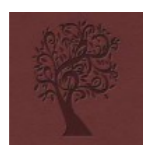
REPLY



Julie Miles says:
10/16/2015 at 2:31 am

When my son was in year 4 at school he wanted to play clarinet. I let him do lessons for one term, but he didn't practice. I stopped the lessons as I refused to waste the money. In year 11 he took the clarinet up again, and he studied and obtained his Bachelor of Music in classical clarinet. He is now first clarinet in the Band of the Welsh Guards

REPLY



Tony says:
10/16/2015 at 7:38 am

Wow! Very neat. How interesting how these things happen!

REPLY



Kathleen says:
10/15/2015 at 11:42 pm

I wanted to learn an instrument in school and my parents didn't allow it, so my perspective is different. I always wanted to play and have tried many instruments, some with lessons, some without. I am 62 and started the cello 14 years ago and love my lessons, practice and group play. Learning to read music in school has enabled me to play throughout my life.

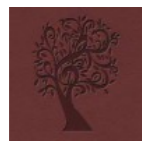
My daughter has played many instruments as well, but did not want lessons because she just wanted a leisure activity and we respected that.

Just because you stop lessons in childhood does not mean you cannot resume them as an adult.

There are many things a child must do; music lessons is not one of them. Respect their preferences as you want yours respected.

I didn't make them eat Brussels sprouts either!

REPLY



Tony says:
10/16/2015 at 7:41 am

Kathleen, this is certainly true. But the benefits of learning to play an instrument at a young age are enormous, and I would hate to deny students that opportunity. I am sorry that happened to you.

REPLY



Kathleen says:
10/17/2015 at 12:35 am

No regrets. Had a good childhood and full life.

REPLY



Julie Miles says:
10/16/2015 at 2:26 am

Music is a huge financial commitment, and I sometimes don't think parents realize the cost. I guess we spent more than \$30,000 on lessons, instruments, sheet music, servicing the instruments, music stands and all the other bits and pieces Sam (My son) needed. He has a wonderful career in music, but he had to go to London to live his dream. I guess some people just can't afford the cost. Our son was lucky that we both worked and could afford the cost. Sam always tells us how thankful he is that we supported his desire to become a musician. Many of his friends were not so lucky. Sam is first clarinet in The Band of the Welsh Guards and travels all over the world performing. He is surely living his dream.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/16/2015 at 7:40 am

IN many districts in the US, music is part of the school day (as it should be). There is a cost to rent the instrument – which in some cases is taken care of by the school for economically less fortunate students. IN many cases, we are talking \$10 – \$20 a month in the early years, without private lessons. WE can make this happen for our kids.

REPLY



Linda says:
10/16/2015 at 3:41 am

I played my instrument for 12 years, but never practiced and wasn't "required " to by my parents. And I wished they had!

Now ny daughter is 7 years into learning violin. From day 1 she was required to sign a 12 month contract agreeing to practice, do homework, attend lessons and ensemble. There was lots of screaming and crying. Out came the contract. I was determined not to let her give up

Despite all the drama, every new year she would agree to enter into a new contract. And for many years, the drama ensued.

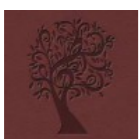
And finally, she's reached the place where playing well can give her that spiritual experience which is unequalled any other way.

And I know that she will have that experience so many more times that I did, as she has worked to gain the skills required to achieve it.

And she will have that for life.

Worth every tear and tantrum!!!

REPLY



Tony says:
10/16/2015 at 7:37 am

A good story! It is hard to watch your kid cry and be upset – there is a huge part of us who believe that they must be right. But often, they are not seeing the forest through the trees, and we must help them.

REPLY



Jack says:
10/16/2015 at 2:15 pm

This article presents an interesting perspective, with comments pro and con. I understand both perspectives while at the same time a supporter for music instruction. A key in every child's direction requires support and enthusiasm for their efforts while at the same time understanding how well the child adapts to instruction. For example I thrived with music but may have failed terribly with sports.

Growing up, my parents supported and encouraged music. I don't ever recall being forced to practice. I always received positive feedback for my musical accomplishments. My mother spent countless hours waiting in the car during music lessons. Both parents typically attended concert events. Sports never played a part in my youth, maybe a result

of my parents low interest. Who's to say I may have gained traction in sports had they viewed it differently.

When our sons began playing instruments we made sure we were their biggest fans, My wife always made over our sons squawks and squeaks, what starting musicians make, as if they were sounds from a beautiful symphony. Although I am the musical parent, it was their mother's encouragement and gentle support that truly developed the musician in our sons. I was simply one of the navigators on their musical journey. It's simple....Children typically thrive when they receive positive support.

Like · Reply · 9 mins · Edited

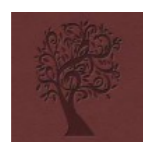
REPLY



Jack says:
10/17/2015 at 1:44 pm

Some of the comments saddens me to learn that there are those who had such an awful experience with music instruction. There are no doubt parents and instructors who have played a role in negative attitudes. Think how lack of positive reinforcement for learning or life experiences impact success and achievement? Wynton Marsalis once shared that if more young people were ENCOURAGED to play an instrument we might not have the level of troubled youth we see today. His comments came from first hand experience seeing poverty and lack of direction that chipped away the very soul of young people around him. Think how many kids may quit every worthwhile activity in life if not for support, encouragement and praise. It's amazing how some begin a journey of music with an path anticipating failure by limiting a trial time of a year. Curious how many other things may fail if we approached it in that manner. To be successful in life we have to make a commitment to whatever we do, one without time limitations or expectations of failure. Granted, failure is typically a part of the process but those who have positive reinforcement find a way to reach satisfaction for a job well done. The reality is it's not just music that is impacted by shortsightedness or lack of support. It's all about the approach, attitude and perseverance which helps one with achievement. That's life.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/17/2015 at 4:01 pm

It's comments like these that are worded so eloquently that make me happy I have a blog. Thanks for this.

REPLY



Jason says:
10/16/2015 at 9:16 pm

Is there any type of teacher who DOESN'T blame parents for every ill in society?

Are all teachers the greatest parents in the world?

This article is full of sweeping generalizations and is poorly developed.

REPLY



Tony says:
10/17/2015 at 11:59 am

Jason, there are plenty of teachers who do not blame parents for this – of course there are. And as far as this teacher is concerned, if you look around my blog you will see plenty of posts about teachers and admins taking ownership for childrens' growth. As for developing my articles and being less general – I'll work on it.

REPLY



Arete Music Academy says:
10/17/2015 at 10:25 am

Great Article, we will share it on our blog

REPLY



gipsika says:
10/17/2015 at 1:26 pm

Thank you for this! I'd love to reblog it. Lots of food for thought.

I do believe that there are some kids that are simply not talented. I've worked with some – guess that makes me not quite the “universal teacher”. Very few, mind. But keep in mind that enthusiasm is part of talent. If a kid believes themselves to be too musical to practice, they should be alerted to the fact that truly musical people always practice.

What I found mostly is the more regularly children practice, the less they want to quit. This is a function that has been studied by human ethologists (the biological version of an investigative psychologist). The more you do something, the better you get, of course; but here comes the kicker: The better you get, the more you enjoy doing that thing, even if you started out feeling rather so-so about it. I'm looking at that Steve's commentary up there and I'm finding what went wrong there:

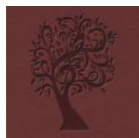
Firstly, he didn't want to play a musical instrument to begin with, his parents wanted him to. (How many kids feel like that who are forced into some team sport and hate it but are not allowed to quit? Interesting to hear the opposite perspective for once.) I find it amazing and very encouraging that there are places that have instrumental music as a *curricular* subject. So is math. Kids also hate math and they are also forced to take it up to a certain level and looking back, it also builds their brains. Yes, Steve, it has been shown in many independent studies that music does improve overall brain function; it's like saying, sport builds muscles. Of course it does! So if you complain because you are not as muscled as the guy who did sports all his life and you quit sports early on – see how laughable? You make your own choices in that respect. Optimally, kids should do music AND sports.

But another thing that went wrong was that it was “band”. There is an enormous difference between “band” (which, TBH, I also hated with a passion) and dedicated, 1:1 musical tuition in an instrument. Band is a lot of noise by a lot of kids who'd rather be out on the sports field. Even helping with a school “orchestra” last year which consisted mainly of percussion and marimbas (and 3 forlorn little violins) had me walking out with a migraine every time. “Band” is not exactly an inspiration to learn music, in fact some of us would debate whether it can be called “music” at all and shouldn't rather be termed “freakish noise”. Steve, even as an adult, let me advise you to try again. Pick an instrument you like the actual sound of; get a copy, and play around on it. (There must have been something that drew you to reading a music blog.) If you really hate it even in that setting, well fine, end of story. But you may discover something you missed out on, that you enjoy.

Then again, too, I agree that parents overload their children, and schools overload the children with sports. I was teaching at a school where the sports coaches could walk into a music lesson and grab the student out of the lesson because “he has an extra hockey practice now”, and when we (the music teachers) complained we were told flatly by the principal, “sports comes first”. (I’m not teaching there any longer. They clearly don’t need me.)

This blog post is so in-depth that I’d like to discuss the thoughts on a blog-post of my own...

REPLY



Tony says:
10/17/2015 at 4:00 pm

Some really fantastic points here – thanks for this! As a former band director who only taught in large groups of 80+ students from the very early stages of instruction: my former students occupy seats in music ed institutions and conservatories all over the country. Band is ABSOLUTELY an inspiration to learn music. Luckily for you, I saw your violin blog and forgive you for your bias masked as being uninformed. It’s a string player thing – I have lived with it for a long time.

REPLY

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