

Making the Connection

A Guide for Talking with Parents and Students



MTNA

MUSIC TEACHERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

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Keiser has written for the editorial page of The Cincinnati Enquirer on a variety of family related issues. She is the author of "Helping Children Deal with Grief," which was published in Catechist, and she has contributed to several parenting books such as Growing Up Again, 2nd edition, by Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson, How Much is Enough?: Everything you Need to Know to Steer Clear of Overindulgence and Raise Likable, Responsible, and Respectful Children, by Jean Illsley Clarke, Connie Dawson and David Bredehoft, and Time-In by Jean Illsley Clarke.

Keiser has taught parenting classes at a community correctional facility for seven years and teaches classes on self-esteem, parenting, stress, forgiveness, the effects of domestic violence, and grief and loss issues in a variety of venues, including local, state and national conferences. She also has experience working with children and their families in a school setting. Keiser is married and lives in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Music teachers are involved in a “high-touch” (as opposed to “high-tech”) profession. Because there is daily interaction with others, there is a constant amount of communication that can run the emotional gamut. And since teachers are in the business of teaching people—not music—most will, at some point, if it hasn’t happened already, be met with difficult and exhausting situations with parents and students.

Making the Connection: A Guide for Talking with Parents and Students has been developed by MTNA, with the assistance of a professional counselor. It offers ideas for handling difficult situations while building connections, not barriers.

“In all of our interactions with people, we bring a countless number of reactions, beliefs, and feelings that are guided by our life experiences and that determine how we connect with others,” explains Sandra Keiser, the counselor with whom MTNA collaborated to write this guide. “This collection of experiences can help or hinder us in our relationships with others, and ourselves, as well as in our professions.

“When it comes to teaching, the relationship is key,” Keiser further explains. “Music teachers have several relationships: the relationship with the student, the relationship with the parents, and how music teachers and parents together encourage a positive relationship between the student and music.”

Making the Connection looks at the relationship between the child and music by considering the phases of learning to determine how to build those relationships and motivate students. It offers specific guidelines for words to say and actions that may be taken by both teachers and parents at each stage of the learning process. Additionally, the guide reinforces the need for written studio policies or agreements with students and refers you back to those agreements to guide you through difficult circumstances.

Other topics addressed include:

- Establishing Studio Policies/Agreements
- Discipline
- Student Accountability
- Addressing Difficult Statements

Making the Connection: A Guide for Talking with Parents and Students is available on the MTNA website at www.mtna.org by clicking on “Marketplace” or by calling (888) 512-5278.

“Hello, Mrs. Campbell? I’d like to enroll my son Greg in piano lessons.”

What thoughts and feelings run through your mind as you hear these words? Excitement? Fear? Wonder? Knot in your stomach? Dread? Enthusiasm? Relief? Take a few moments to consider what is going on inside of you.

Laying the Groundwork

In all of our interactions with people, we bring a countless number of reactions, beliefs, and feelings that are guided by our life experiences and that determine how we connect with others. This collection of experiences can help or hinder us in our relationships with ourselves and others, as well as in our professions. What I say to myself about what is going on has a direct affect on the outcome.

If there is a sense of heaviness about how you approach teaching, now may be a good time to think about where you’ve been, where you are and where you want to be. This guide will help you plan for success.

Teaching Music is a Profession

We all know that words and actions need to match in order to send a consistent message. Unless you have someone to handle the business aspects of your studio, you are the “Director of First Impressions” with the parents and students. How you present yourself and your business and connect with people during the first three minutes is critical in laying the groundwork for later on. How you incorporate warmth, love for your work, professionalism, structure and expectations, and making music fun is a matter of style. It is worth putting time and energy into thinking about what you want to convey before you get that phone call. If you’re not sure about how to do that, think about how you might want to meet your child’s music teacher for the first time. What are you looking for? And why?

It's About Relationships

When it comes to teaching, the relationship is key. Music teachers have several relationships: the relationship with the student, the relationship with the parents, and how music teachers and parents together encourage a positive relationship between the student and music. The relationship between the child and his or her parents is important as well, and while you may have some input, your influence there may be limited. More about that later.

For help looking at the relationship between the child and music, let's consider the phases of learning to determine how to build those relationships and motivate students. In the book, *Developing Talent in*

Young People, Benjamin Bloom suggests that the best way to teach a skill is to love doing the skill yourself. His study looked not only at how superstars in science, music and sports learned their skills, but also at the teachers who led them.

The first teacher helped the student "fall in love" with the subject, the second taught standards and the third mentored. It was important that the process took place in that order.

Following is how the studies done by Benjamin Bloom would apply to teaching music.

The Early Years—The Playful Phase

This phase typically represents 3- to 7-year-olds, or may come later. It is a time when the child experiences music as fun. Given the opportunity to play and have fun, followed by positive reinforcement and smiles, the student is actually led to "fall in love" with music. Teachers are seen as "very kind, very nice and enormously patient." During this phase, making music enticing and enjoyable take precedence over objective measures of achievement. While the early phase is characterized with play and fun, this leads to greater skill and the knowledge that music is something that could be studied seriously. Parents help children develop habits of practice and discipline while the activity is predominantly "fun." Some parents are musical, and this is another way for parents and their children to connect. Teachers arrange for small recitals throughout the year.



"Music teachers have several relationships..."

Students typically lose interest if they are allowed to do whatever they want (the mentoring phase) before learning the basics, and if they are expected to learn too many technical skills (the standards and skills phase) during this early “falling in love” period.

What this means for the teacher and parent partnership: This is a great time to talk with parents about what they are looking for as they provide this opportunity for their child. Find out what their expectations are and spend time talking with them about what they can realistically expect from their child and from you. Here is where you have the chance to educate them about making music fun for their child and can suggest home activities that will set up the child for success. Stress the parents’ importance in this and that the lesson is just one part of the process. If it is a chore or a burden, or if the child is doing it to “please the parents,” the child will quickly lose interest as with any other chore.

As you listen to the parents, you will get a good idea why they are enrolling their child in music lessons. In this busy and competitive world, parents often are pressured to involve their children in as much as possible. They sometimes

do this without thinking about the impact on themselves, the child and other family members.

Give the parents as much information as possible about the lessons, their involvement and ways they can be a powerful influence on the child’s appreciation of music. If you’d like parents to attend a lesson from time



“Give the parents as much information as possible about the lessons...”

to time, tell them. If you need to, use the analogy with sports. You can say that when children are involved in sports, there are many games for parents to attend. Since music lessons are basically something done alone, with one or two recitals a year, children need additional support.

Having positive preventative contact will lessen the chance of potential problems arising. Let parents know about the importance of encouragement and how they speak to the child about practicing. Even using the word “practice” at this phase may imply that this is a duty.

Here are some words that parents and teachers can use to encourage a positive connection to the music during this phase:

For Parents

- “Tell me what you are learning from Ms. or Mr.... ”
- “I look forward to hearing you play what you are learning. ”
- “I’m going to sit and listen to you play the song that you are learning ” (said in a supportive, caring, non-threatening way; parent gives full attention and does not read, play computer games or engage in conversation with others)
- “Did you learn something new today at your music lesson?”

For Parents or Teachers

- “Let me hear that again. ”
- “I enjoy hearing you play that song or piece. Tell me what you like about it. ”
- “Your playing is music to my ears. ”
- “You played that well. I’m proud of you. Are you proud of yourself?”
- “Which piece would you like to play first today?”
- “You are improving each time you play that piece. Do you hear the difference?”

Some actions that parents and teachers can do during this phase include:

For Parents

- Break the “practice” times into smaller segments if you see that the child is getting bored or restless. Maybe his or her shoulders get tense and a back or shoulder rub is in order.
- Spend time offering genuine encouragement to the child.
- If this is becoming a power struggle, it’s time to look at what else is going on.
- Be aware of how you speak about the music lessons or the practice. If it’s “just another thing to do” and a “chore” for you, it will certainly be a chore for the child as well.

For Teachers

- Have one or two short recitals each year.
- Allow or expect new students to attend a recital without performing. That way they can appreciate the music others play, get an idea of what they can do and also ease into the recital scene if they have performance jitters.

- If you are accepting a student who has prior musical experience, do an assessment of his or her skill level during the first one or two lessons. Share with the parent and student your teaching plan for building on what they already know or the need to do some remediation.
- Set up an agreement or contract with the parent and child stating that you will review their progress quarterly or every four to six months. This would be similar to a parent-teacher conference at a school. Focus on what the child is doing well and how he or she is improving. In this phase, it may be learning just for the fun of it. Note if there are some things that need to be changed. Ask the parent for input and include the child. Oftentimes, children have great ideas about how to improve the learning process.
- An exploratory contract might be appropriate for a beginning student. At the end of the designated period, students, parents and teacher mutually decide to extend the exploratory contract, move forward or terminate the lessons.

The Middle Years

Children usually enter this next phase between ages 10 and 13. During this time, the focus of instruction is on skill, mastery and details. Isaac Stern spoke to this period: "Somewhere along the line, the child must become possessed by music, by the sudden desire to play, to excel. It can happen at any time between the ages of 10 and 14. Suddenly the child begins to work, and in retrospect the first five or six years seem like kinderspiel, fooling around." (Isaac Stern, *The New York Times Magazine*, December 23, 1979)

During this phase, the student learns about music and musicians, and there is a greater concentration on competitions and performances. The excitement and challenges of being involved in these events serves as positive reinforcement for the time and hard work invested in practice. The relationship between the student and teacher shifts from one of love to one of respect. While the instructor sets the agenda for the lessons, the student is expected "to take an active role in solving technical problems and thinking about musical issues." Motivation comes from family members who demonstrate support for musical development by making both personal and financial sacrifices. During this phase the student develops skills, competence and an identity as a musician. The musician/student recognizes his or her potential to make music and looks beyond the notes to learn about the relationship between content, history and culture, and the music being played. While some take steps toward becoming professional, others prefer a different form of accomplishment.

What this means for the teacher and parent partnership: You have a child who is “hooked” on music and is ready to enter this next phase. It’s time to talk with the parent and child about that. Again, the focus will be on what the parents’ and child’s expectations are, as well as input from you about the child’s skill level and potential. If your skills as a teacher are helping children “fall in love” with music in the first phase, now may be the time to make a transition to a teacher who is more focused on the type of instruction that is necessary to move students forward. Depending on the goals of the parent and child, they may decide to move forward into this phase or continue in the first phase. Either is OK.

Letting parents and children know what to expect here is very important. Educate them about how the focus of the lessons will change and that the child will learn about technique, musicians and the broader place of music in the world. If you have a student who is “on the fence” about moving into this phase, move slowly. Start out with a short-term contract and reevaluate in three or four months. Talk about what worked, what didn’t and what adjustments, if any, need to be made. Find out about the student’s vision of their relationship with music and blend their vision with what you know about how they can get there. Whether the student continues in this phase or not, your interest and enthusiasm will have a big influence on their success and musical future. This can be a challenging task for teachers who see great potential in a student who seems to want to “throw it away.” Sometimes young musicians just need a break. If so, give them permission to take one. Let them know that this is OK and that you’d like to check back with them in a month or so to see where they are. This lets them know that you recognize their needs, value their input and respect their process. Realize that there are many ways that people can contribute to the joy and pleasure of creating and appreciating music, and be grateful that you are leaving a legacy through this student. You may never know how a student may use his or her music education to affect others.

Below are some words and actions that the teacher and parent can say and do during the middle phase:

For Parents and Teachers

- Continue to offer encouragement.
- Allow students to experience the frustration of making mistakes.

For Teachers

- Assess students’ skills during the first few lessons. Get an idea of their strengths and weaknesses. Then talk with both the parents and the students about your teaching plan and what they can expect.

- Give permission for students to take their time as they learn the skill. Making statements like “practice makes perfect” or “no pain no gain,” while meant to be helpful, are not encouraging.
- Expect students to think about what would help them master technique. This lets them know they have input and power in the learning process. If they don’t know, offer suggestions and allow them to choose and see what works.
- Realize your students may not learn the same way you do. The more choices they have for learning, the more effective you will be, and they will value your respect of their process.
- Offer suggestions for relaxation. It’s difficult to learn something new if we believe that we have to do it “right now.” Allow students to get up and walk around, do some deep breathing, visualize a quiet place where they can play by themselves without an audience, roll their shoulders or exercise their fingers. Or you or the students may have other ideas.
- If students are well into this phase and making noises about quitting instead of making music, help them figure out why they want to quit. Explore what this means to them, both now and in the future. The goal is not to get them to stay, but to help them to make an informed decision that they are comfortable with. If they decide to leave, let them know you have enjoyed working with them, if you did, and let them know if they decide to come back, you will be glad to have them as students.

The Later Years

In this phase of learning, which usually occurs between ages 16 and 20, students are learning how to make music their own and are assisted by their teachers in developing a personal style. By this time, the student makes a shift to being more in charge of the music making while working with master teachers, like respected faculty members at universities or concert pianists. Teachers working with these students assume that their students are serious, motivated and disciplined. To the young musician, the teacher’s presence provides motivation and inspiration. Students begin to assume more responsibility for their professional development, working out some of the musical challenges on their own and using their teachers as coaches. Parental support shifts from that of encouragement to taking on additional financial support.

What this means for the teacher and parent partnership: Begin by establishing goals and objectives. What do students hope to accomplish? What are they looking for in a teacher? Are you the best teacher to assist this student in meeting the goals that he or she wants to achieve? If not, are you willing to help him or her find a teacher who can do this?

Be clear about what is involved in making a commitment to music at this level. Let them know what is required in terms of time, energy, performances, competitions and travel. Be frank about the amount of financial commitment as well.

Continue with the ideas in Phases One and Two. Students need support and encouragement at all levels of learning.

Encourage exploration of style and technique, perhaps suggesting that students audiotape their selections to see which style they prefer.



“Be clear about what is involved in making a commitment to music...”

Agreements

The suggestions mentioned previously are meant to be preventative and to set up a situation where the students, parent and teacher can experience success. Contracts, agreements and guidelines clarify expectations, as well as accountability. These agreements are only good if all the parties make sure the agreement is followed. Given that, many of the issues that arise between parents, teachers and students can be resolved by referring to this agreement. Remember that you have a business to run, and part of running a business is having clear rules about what you will and will not do. If this is new, you may need to constantly remind yourself that this is about how you can take care of yourself and keep your business growing. It's not personal, despite the individual contact between you and the student.

Things to Consider When Establishing a Studio Policy or Agreement:

- Length and frequency of the lessons.
- The amount of compensation and how and when it will be accepted: cash, check, credit card.
- Expectations and consequences for missed or “forgotten” payments.
- Cancellation and “no show” policy; rescheduled lessons; include what you consider to be legitimate reasons for missing lessons. You might believe that family and religious events come first and create an acceptable excuse. Conflicts due to sports practices or games means rescheduling the lessons since teams involve many players and piano lessons often involve one player, so it is easier to reschedule the lesson.
- Length of the agreement.
- State what is expected of students and parents in terms of preparation and participation in the lesson.
- State what the parents and students can expect from you in terms of teaching.
- State what is expected of students and parents in terms of recitals (active participation and attendance). If they do not attend a recital, let them know that they will be expected to make up the recital in some way. Consider having them do some additional work regarding a particular performer; have them select a musical event that they will attend or listen to and report back to you about what they learned or noticed; have them listen to the same piece as recorded or performed by different artists and tell about the differences or similarities; build in part of a lesson where they can perform for other students or friends. You can give options, or have them think

of something on their own. Be sure that what is done is something that you both agree to.

Discipline: When and How

Children bring all of their life experiences to the classroom and are oftentimes pre-occupied with worries, excitement and other events that are not made known to the teacher. These may include thinking

about a parent in the military, an anticipated birthday party, rehashing an argument with a parent or sibling, dealing with a bully and so on. Usually these come out in the form of attitudes and behaviors that may interfere with learning. Several suggestions for addressing these behaviors are listed

below. Experiment and use what will work for you—you may have ideas of your own, too. Know that what works with some students, may not work with others, so having many options will increase your effectiveness.



“Children bring all of their life experiences to the classroom...”

Prevention includes what can be done in advance by parents and the teacher to help students stay focused on the class.

For the teacher

- Be sure that you are prepared for class before students arrive. Greet them as they come in and make them feel welcome.
- Look at the studio to see what physical adjustments might be made to maximize the students' focus. This could be anything from rearranging the room set up or students' seating to restructuring the class format.
- Take a moment at the beginning of the lesson to have the students close their eyes and to leave any feelings and activities that will keep them from paying attention, at the door. While they are in your studio, they are expected to put their energy into the music.
- Set up a few simple rules to be followed in the class: listen to the teacher or, if it's a group class, to other students who may be playing a piece; only speak when asked a question by the teacher, keep

your hands on your instrument or in your lap, and so on. This will work better if the teacher explains the reason for the rules, asks students if they are willing to follow the rules and includes any rules students may want to add. Post the rules in the studio, and review them at the beginning of each lesson. Having students read the rules aloud helps them “own” this part of the agreement. Expect that students will need to be reminded of the rules throughout the class. After all, the job of 6- to 12-year-olds is to test rules, so in the beginning much time may be spent reminding them of the rules. Students need to be sure you are steady in your beliefs about the rules. Another option is making the rules a formal part of the studio policy that is signed by students and parents.

- Offer encouragement and support. Let students know you believe in them and expect them to succeed.
- Set expectations and focus on strengths, and that will set a positive tone for the lesson.
- Provide incentives so students will be eager to come to class and get to work. This may include reviewing the rules, or selecting a favorite piece to play first.
- When giving directions, be sure you have students’ attention.
- Link something students like to do with something that is less fun. For example, “When you have completed the theory page, you can play the song you learned this week.”
- Give lots of praise, laugh and have fun.

For group lessons

- Check to see that students are grouped together according to ability level. If adjustments need to be made with the groupings, make them.
- Have fun and mix it up when selecting students to play or respond. You might have a jar or basket with papers that say “the person with a birthday in January,” “someone who has a dog,” “the person with red hair” and so forth. When calling on students, use a paper from the jar. That way they are surprised, the same person is not called on all the time, and it motivates them to pay attention.

For the parent

- Create an atmosphere that will support and encourage learning.
- Have parents remind students before lessons to focus their attention on the music and the lesson.
- Establish a way to transition from one activity to another. Many children may have difficulty “shifting gears” as they move, for example, from soccer practice to music lessons. Figuring out a way to smooth

the shift in activities will likely aid focus in the lesson.

- Set a positive tone for students to explore music making and to cooperate in the class

Helping students establish a sense of accountability involves getting students to stop certain behaviors, so that the behaviors are not repeated. While it may be tempting to pick up on each behavior, decide what is important for your students and teaching style, and pick your battles. When holding students accountable for their actions be sure to remain detached, calm and firm. This is easier said than done. If given in an exasperated, blaming, pleading or sarcastic tone of voice, the situation often escalates, and the spirit of the session can take a downward turn. The goal is to make the student aware of the behavior and to take responsibility for changing it. Explain the consequences in a direct, matter-of-fact tone of voice. This may take some practice, however, the time and energy put into this is well worth it. Remember, that just like the students need to practice to learn the music, they also need to practice and learn the rules. Some of the consequences may need to be repeated in order for them to learn the expected behaviors. Suggestions for holding the students accountable for their behavior:

- Establish eye contact with students before disciplining.
- Remind students of the rules.
- Stop the lesson until everyone is focused on what needs to be done.
- Stand or move near the student who is breaking the rule. Physical presence by an adult is sometimes enough to stop the behavior.
- When attempting to stop a behavior, *te//* the student to stop—don't ask.
- Tell students what behavior to "stop," and what to behavior "start,"
- Redirect the student to another task.
- Ask students for suggestions about what they think they need to do to solve the problem.
- Remove students from the situation to release energy and calm themselves until they are ready to participate. This may mean setting up a place in the studio for them to do that.
- If it is necessary to have a conference with a parent, be clear about what behavior needs to be corrected, what you have done about it, the results and how you would like the parents to assist you. This may include asking for suggestions from the parent(s) about what has worked for them or if they have additional ideas about what might work.
- If this is in a group setting, consider that the student may do better in a one-on-one lesson.
- If the behavior continues, despite all efforts to change them, it may

be necessary to have the student take a break or to terminate his or her lessons.

- Take time outside of class to talk with the student about the behavior.

If the student behavior is more passive, such as making faces, rolling eyes, or just an attitude of not wanting to be there, you have several possible responses. One possibility is to ignore the behavior. This may be an attempt to focus your attention on them instead of the lesson. You *can* choose to proceed. If

you are in a group setting, be sure the behavior isn't disruptive to others before proceeding. Once students learn you will not be drawn in to this, they may stop. Another option would be to use any of the methods listed above, especially if the attitude is interfering with their participation in the class. They may also be



“If you are in a group setting, be sure the behavior isn't disruptive to others...”

looking for a way to “get out of the lessons,” and see this as a means to that end. A parent conference may be useful to get a better perspective about what is happening.

Addressing Tough Statements

A parent says, “My child is no longer interested in music and wants to quit.”

This statement can have a variety of meanings and needn’t throw you into a panic about losing a student. How you respond can be the defining factor as to whether or not the student continues.

- If this comes at you at an inconvenient time, suggest that you arrange a time to meet and talk about it further. Realize they may have already made the decisions and may not want input from you.
- Show respect and care as *they* struggle with this issue. Let the student know you will miss him or her and that he or she has talent (if appropriate).
- If you have an agreement or studio policy, use that as a basis for your discussions. Ask the parents what they think is happening.
- Talk to the student about what he or she hopes to gain or believes will be different by quitting. Let the student know you expect him or her to think about this and be prepared to talk about it at the next lesson.
- Suggest that you continue the lessons based on what was agreed upon earlier, listening to the student’s concerns and making some adjustments if need be.
- Continue to give validation, support, and keep listening and talking.
- Whenever we learn a skill, whether it’s tying a shoe, shooting basketball, learning the piano or becoming an artist, it takes time to get good at it, so it’s possible that the student (or even parent) wants immediate gratification. Let them know it can take time.
- You can also suggest taking a break, or have the student do some reading about a musician or other person they admire, giving information about the journey that person made in their career. Or have him or her interview someone he or she admires, asking how they got to where they are. Actually, this might be a good assignment to give along the way to any student.

The statement, “My child is no longer interested in music and wants to quit,” is a classic invitation for the teacher to “fix” the problem. The temptation here is to become defensive and preach, which leaves all of the parties uncomfortable. Another choice is to make attempts to “fix it” for the parent and child by saying “That’s OK” and then the teacher may end up feeling angry or resentful. Consider asking the parent what he or she would like to do about this. Explore what “quitting” means to them. How does this fit into teaching the child about decision making?



“There certainly may be very legitimate reasons for quitting...”

There certainly may be very legitimate reasons for quitting, however it seems to make sense to help parents understand the benefits of making an informed decision.

“My child is no longer interested in music” could also represent a struggle between the parent and the child,

with music lessons being the current forum for that. Teachers don’t have the benefit of having that information, so handling it in a calm professional manner, will bring some structure to the situation.

Other challenging statements may include:

“Lessons aren’t fun”; “We take summers off”; “I think my son should be playing harder pieces”; “We have soccer on Thursday’s now, so we can’t come to lessons. ”

Again, these are statements that invite the teacher to “fix” or “do something.” Rather than feel helpless or trying to figure out what the parent is thinking, it’s time to ask for clarification. A few suggestions are listed below, and you may think of some others.

- “Help me to understand this a bit more. ”
- “Tell me what you mean. ”
- “What would you like to do?”
- “What is it that you need from me?”

Once you have answers to these questions, use this opportunity to educate parents and students about the effects of missing lessons over an extended period of time. Connect the goals they mentioned when starting the lessons as a basis for what results they can anticipate. Be clear, professional, straight-forward and nonjudgmental. Whatever the outcome, you can know you have given the parents the information needed to make an informed decision.

Difficult Statements from Students

Students also come up with statements that can be challenging. These may include “I hate music”; “I was too busy this week, so I didn’t practice”; “I don’t like this piece.”

These statements are also invitations for the teacher to “fix” the situation, distract you from the current issue at hand (playing the piece), get a reaction from you or some other reason. The following responses indicate that you have heard them and you are taking charge by setting up what will happen next.

- “I’m sorry to hear that. Let’s get busy so I can hear what you’ve learned, and I’ll ask you near the end of the lesson if you’d like to talk about it. ”
- “This isn’t one of my favorite pieces either. It does teach (name the skill that they are learning). Once you have learned it, you can move on to something new. ”
- “I’ll listen to you practice now. ”

The comments below solicit more input from the student. What you say will be a matter of style, and what you think might work best with a particular student.

- “Tell me more about that. ”
- “Let’s make the most of our time together. How would you like to spend your lesson time today?”
- “What would help you make time to practice (set up a schedule, post-it notes)?” Be sure to reinforce what they decide to do.
- “What would you like to do about that?”

The Teacher's Role

Another key element in this process is teacher accountability. If parents and students are expected to make a commitment to learning to play an instrument, teachers need to be equally committed to the student and the parent. One way to ensure accountability is having a clear agreement for what will be taught and what is expected from students and parents. Teachers need to check themselves to be sure they are following through and keeping their commitments. It's up to the teacher to take the lead in contacting parents to schedule a meeting to discuss progress. Other areas for teachers to consider include being on time and consistent about keeping to the agreed upon lesson times and honesty about one's own assets and limitations. If the teacher is not consistent about enforcing studio policies, or frequently cancels lessons, people might conclude that teaching is not a priority for him or her and then decide that "if the teacher doesn't care, why should I?"

Self-care for teachers is important to be fully present and attentive to the needs of the students and motivate them to learn. A tired, worried or preoccupied teacher will affect what and how students learn. Below are some suggestions for teachers:

- Give yourself the gift of time. If you are rushing, overscheduled and stressed, that energy will carryover to the class or lesson. Take a break.
- Check to see if your expectations of the students are realistic.
- Examine your own angers and resentments.
- Get support from other teachers or friends and family.
- When talking about your work, talk about the positive things that are happening. Bringing up the negatives will only reinforce them.

The Unknown Factors

At the beginning of this guide, reference was made to the many life experiences that we bring to relationships (Laying the Groundwork). It's important to note that students and parents bring their life experiences to the learning process as well. Music teachers may not have access to this information for a variety of reasons. While the primary role of the teacher is to teach the students, as in any teaching role, there are factors that enhance or detract from the learning process. Realize that you can be a powerful influence in your student's appreciation of music, and, at the same time, your efforts may be limited by unknown factors. Teachers are responsible for what and how they teach, students are responsible for learning.

References

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Credits:

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