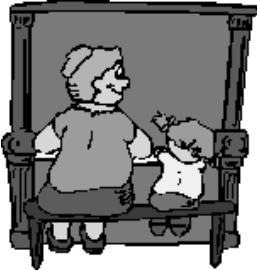


“Parent’s Daily Dozen”

by Stephanie Judy



The “Parent’s Daily Dozen” practice chart was developed by Stephanie Judy and Vicky Barham

in response to a discussion in 2001 on the Suzuki-Chat e-mail list about what teachers can do to help parents gain better skills at being a practice coach or “home teacher.”

After being discussed and revised via Suzuki-Chat, it was tested at various Suzuki Institutes and in several teachers’ studios, with both teachers and parents reporting that it was useful.

(The following notes have been adapted for piano by Diane Briscoe).

Some general notes about practicing

For most children younger than about 12, taking music lessons and learning to play an instrument is primarily the parent’s commitment.

Some children are enthusiastic, some are not. No child is aware of the challenges ahead. Every child needs the parent’s consistent, loving support to meet those challenges day after day.

The first year is the hardest. You may encounter some rocky times—you may even regret that you got started! Hang in there! If things get really rugged, contact your teacher or phone an experienced parent to get some ideas and encouragement.

During the first year, we are not so much teaching your child how to play the piano as we are teaching you how to understand how your child learns . . . not how children in general learn, but how your own child learns best.

In Suzuki piano practice, the relationship of the parent to the child is very much like the parent/child relationship in learning to cross a street. At first, the parent has total responsibility, and the child has none—the child simply goes along for the ride, in arms, in a stroller, or in a backpack. Gradually, however, the child begins assuming more and more “street-crossing” responsibility—first by holding the parent’s hand instead of being carried, and then by walking beside the parent without holding hands. At some point, the child learns to look for cars and helps decide when it’s safe to cross, and so forth. As the years go by, the parent very gradually relinquishes responsibility to the child.

Piano practice is the same way. **You will “carry” your child for a long time**—maybe weeks, maybe months, maybe years. You will see to it that the practice happens, you will play the recording everyday, and you will ensure that the environment

is positive, (although you can certainly enlist your child’s help).

If you and I do our jobs well, then, little by little, your child will take over responsibility. By the time your child is 12 or 13, he or she will likely be practicing independently, and—I can promise you this—you will look back and feel that it was worth the effort.

Some specific notes about the “Parent’s Daily Dozen”

1. Listening. Please let your child hear the Suzuki book level recording a minimum of three times each day (about an hour in total). Daily listening is the single factor that is most strongly correlated to a student’s success in a Suzuki program.



2. Setting the Practice Time.

Make practicing a routine event that happens at the same time every day. Pick a time when your child is reasonably alert but also calm.

In most families, it’s best to set a practice time as early as possible in the day so that if it doesn’t happen, you still have time left in the day to do it. It’s also a good idea to tie practicing to another inevitable daily event ---“After lunch, we practice.” **The hardest part of practicing is getting to the piano.**

3. Preparing. Put your piano in a room that's not too isolated, but where there will be a minimum of conflicts between practice and family activities. Having the piano in the basement, for example, or in the T.V room, may not be ideal. You will be spending a lot of time in this space, so make it inviting and special: add a vase of flowers or put up some photos of composers and pianists--including your child!

Before the practice starts—earlier in the day, if you can—jot some notes about what you plan to accomplish. If it helps you to use a practice task chart (for your child), by all means do so.

4. Initiating the Practice. Children often dislike changing from one activity to another. A bit of warning helps smooth the way: "In 10 minutes, it will be time to practice. Find a stopping place in your book/game/puzzle."

5. "Bracketing" the Practice. A specific gesture to signal the beginning and end of practice helps to keep focus on the work at hand. It could be simply getting on, and off, the bench: once the child is seated, all attention is on practice.

6. Giving Practice a High Priority. A parent's attention is a precious commodity for a child. Practicing together gives you an opportunity to offer undivided attention to your child every day. Your child will take cues from you about the value of practicing. If you give it only a quarter of your attention, your child is not likely to develop much commitment to it, either.

7. Offering Encouragement. The key word here is effort. You are acknowledging EFFORT—not achievement. (Achievement will come through effort, and never without it). You can show appreciation non-verbally by smiling, nodding, giving a "thumbs up," applauding, tapping your foot or swaying in time to your child's music, or closing your eyes and listening intently.

8. Creating a Positive Environment. **This is the real key to productive, contented practices.** Your child is working hard and, at times, really struggling. He or she will get discouraged and frustrated from time to time. Your child has a limited understanding of the process; you are the adult, and are able to take a longer view.

A "**one-point practice**" means that you focus on one thing at a time. Avoid, for example, saying, "That was pretty good but your wrist was too low and you forgot the F-sharp and your fingers weren't curved and you're supposed to play staccato and you didn't play the repeat." OVERLOAD! Instead, pick the ONE thing that will make the most difference in the child's playing. This may well be something that was emphasized in the lesson. If you're not sure what to focus on, start at the top of this list and work down:

(1) good posture (2) relaxed playing position (3) beautiful tone (not a harsh sound).

9. Giving Choices. Many children get frustrated when they feel that they don't have any control over the situation. Give your child every choice that you reasonably can. She doesn't get to choose whether or not to practice, and whether or not to play F-sharp or F-natural, but she can choose which review piece she wants to play first, and whether she'd like to do scales at the beginning or end of the practice.

10. Reading. These skills will not only enable your child to explore the huge variety of printed music available for piano, but will also help him become more and more capable of learning music independently.

11. Review. Continuing to play pieces that have been learned ("review pieces") will help your child to solidify skills and to prepare for new challenges ahead. Along with daily listening, playing review pieces will help to make the learning process quicker and easier, and therefore more rewarding for your child.

12. Ending the practice. As often as possible, end the practice when the child is happy and enthusiastic, or end it with something the child especially likes to do.

Parent's and Student's Summary. The last two items on the chart are for you and your child to summarize the day's practice. How was practice today? You can use this space in any way you like. You might want to rate the practice on a scale from 1 to 10, or give 1 to 5 stars (like a movie review). The space for your child's comment is extra big, so that your child can draw a happy face, put on a sticker, or write a few words—whatever seems appropriate.