

How to Help Students Practice

You may say to yourself, “I want to help my child be successful in band but I do not know anything about music or band. How can I help?” The following is a guide to help parents help their child be successful and also to be accountable for the time and effort spent.

One of the most important aspects of playing a musical instrument is the ability to practice correctly. While time and regularity of practice are very important, the quality of the practice is the true determining factor in a musician’s rate of improvement. In fact, **15 minutes of focused and correct practice is more effective than 30 - 40 minutes of poor practice.**

Practice Environment

- Quiet & Calm – Much like studying, practicing an instrument is mostly mental. Their practice area should be quiet and free of distractions - sort of like a library. Make sure siblings, especially, understand that practice time is NOT to be disturbed. If possible, have a place they can always practice, and leave set up for practicing. They must have a music stand, and if they are going to sit, a hard, straight-backed chair is best. Whatever you do, please don’t send them outside or away to practice. Do what you can to avoid making practicing negative, extremely isolated, or feel like a punishment. Having said this, there will be battles over practicing. However, if you treat this the same way you approach homework, brushing your teeth, showers, and other things we do daily, your child will develop the habit of practicing sooner, and there will be fewer battles. (Notice, I didn’t say no battles.....)

Practice Sounds

As parents, you may not be able to help your child with band homework like you can with math homework. However, you can listen - here are a few things you should, and should NOT hear.

What you SHOULD hear:

- Clapping, Counting, or a metronome – Rhythm is key to playing music well. By clapping tricky or new rhythms, by counting out loud before they play, and by playing with a metronome at least some of the time, students increase their level of success, as well as their ability to read rhythms accurately the first time they see them. There is a link to a free online metronome on the band website, [here](#), and lots of free metronome apps available for tablets and smart phones.
- Note-naming – Students should be reading lines from the music and saying the note names out loud. This should also be done while fingering or positioning the notes being said.
- Fundamental Sounds – Students should be working on their sound on just the mouthpiece, mouthpiece and barrel or headjoint. This sound might be a little annoying, but it is essential in

their development of proper embouchure and tone quality. They should work for a steady sound that doesn't waver at all.

What you shouldn't hear

- Clowning Around (for the whole practice time - a little fun for a minute is ok) Sometimes students get curious about their instrument and try new things. However, beginners should not be trying to play really high sounds, or really, really fast music.
- The same song for weeks in a row – Students should enjoy practicing and may sometimes want to go back and play a favorite or two. This is great! But they also need to play the songs they are currently assigned. And, if you are only hearing songs and melodies, then they are not practicing their scales and warm-up exercises. These need to be practiced as well.
- Silence – This seems obvious, but there is value in some practice that does not involve playing. Practicing fingerings alone, or working on rhythms can be silent at times, but should not take up the entire practice time.

How can you help?

- Consistent Times – Try to help your child have a regular practice time (preferably when you are home to hear them practice). If they get in the habit of practicing at the same time every day, this will aid in their practice routine.
- Encourage Performances – Set up a time every so often for your child to perform music for you, or for your family and friends. Encourage them to show off the things they are playing in class or in their private lessons. This will give them performance goals outside of class. This also gives you a chance to point out and praise their growth and improvement.
- Ask Questions – Have your child explain what his or her plan is for their practice session. Ask them about upcoming playing tests or class requirements. Show them you are excited for what they are learning - even let them teach you a few things!
- Always be positive!! An unfortunate, and unforeseen side effect of online learning last spring, was that students came back very unwilling, or even unable to play with a full, loud sound. Well, chances are, with everyone at home, and usually some type of zoom meeting going on, they were repeatedly told to be quiet. Sometimes you will be asked to say something nice about some of the most horrible sounds you've ever heard! :)