

Violin for Children: How to Motivate your Child to Practice Violin

Your child has just picked the violin as the instrument they want to play. It's an exciting time, isn't it? Lessons and/or classes start. For awhile your child practices (or at least holds the violin and makes noises with it) and all is well with the world.

Then, little by little, you notice that your budding violinist starts skipping practice days. Their practice periods start getting shorter. Instead of practicing, they would prefer doing almost anything else.

Lay Down the Law? Lead them with Rewards?

The first natural inclination is to either make practicing a strict requirement (which all by itself won't solve the basic problem) or start giving your child rewards for practicing. There are a couple of problems with this.

If you simply hand down the pronouncement that little Johnny will practice 30 minutes every night, one of a few things will happen. Johnny might, indeed, pick up his violin and saw away on it for 30 minutes. He might protest, but at least he's getting practice, right? Well, yes, but...

The problem with simply "laying down the law" is that your child starts to see practicing as a chore:

- Take out trash
- Walk dog
- Practice violin for 30 minutes

Yuck. This is the easy out for you, the parent, but it doesn't tend to work well.

Don't misunderstand, though. There needs to be a certain amount of **parental motivation**. There are other ways to motivate your child, though. (We'll get into that in just a moment.)

So, what about the second idea? A quarter for each 15 minutes practiced sounds like a good deal, right? Mark off the square on a little sheet, show the sheet to the parental units, get cash....sounds like a great time to be a kid!

The issue with this is that rewarding your youngster in this way is using only what is called in the psychology circles "extrinsic motivation". Extrinsic motivation is, literally, **motivation that comes from outside of oneself**. The problem is that **when the rewards stop coming** (you only have so much money and marking off little squares is only fun for so long), your little one may well stop practicing.

There's nothing wrong with using a practice chart, by the way, but using it as motivation rather than a way to keep track is the path of extrinsic motivation.

How do you motivate your child to practice, the right way?

You need to encourage your child's interests to continue growing with violin.

- Make your home a musical one.
- Play violin music from various periods (including TODAY) in your home.
- Find different genres of violin (jazz violin, rock-n-roll on violin).
- Make music a topic of conversation.
- Take your young violinist to live events and, if possible, bring them up to meet the professional musicians after the performance is finished.
- Encourage your violin player to find out more about violin competitions and music contests. Leave books about the violin and orchestra around in your home.

Depending on the age of your child, you might help them purchase posters that are violin-related for their room. (My room had them all over!) These don't have to be only the "circle of fifths" or "fingering chart" posters at all! One of my favorite posters growing up was one that had several different musical instruments arranged all over it, free-form, with the words "Music is my life!" on it.

If your child is a home-schooler, like I was, they have the option of attending orchestra classes at a school near to your home. This can be a great way to help your

child get in touch with the local music community. Be prepared for some of the school administrators to be a little leery of "allowing" a homeschooler into one of their courses. Don't forget, though, you pay taxes! It is illegal (to my knowledge...I'm not a lawyer) to not allow a child to take a class at their local elementary/middle/high school.

Lessons are another viable option. Sometimes, lessons can seem like they're a way to get kids to practice but a good teacher can do wonders for encouraging your child's interest. Vet the teacher, though. A bad or uninteresting teacher can do a LOT of damage!

Tech-savvy kids can practice their music theory skills using computer games and mobile apps. This will give them quite a boost in class!

Tips for parents during kids' practice sessions

Ideally, especially with younger kids, you'll learn violin right along with them. You should, at least, learn enough to give them feedback occasionally on their form.

Do not take the approach that you'll fix how they hold the violin and bow later, by the way. **Playing with bad form can cause back, shoulder, and even joint problems later on.** It can also make it so your child will not be able to achieve the level of skill they are capable of.

Focus your child on a **goal that is related to the music or playing position.** Rather than saying "Practice this for 15 minutes" (which will glue their eyes to the clock), say something like "Practice this little piece until you can play it 5 times through without looking up any of the notes" or "Practice long bows until you can keep the bow straight 3 times in a row each direction."

Remember to **get their feedback**, too! If your child seems to just be playing through each of their songs by rote, without thinking about them, ask a few leading questions. Here are some suggestions:

- "Out of all your music, what's the hardest part?"
- "What would that sound like slowed way down?"

- "Can you play that on a different string?"
- "What would you like to play next?"
- "Can you play me something you think I'd like?"

Do you have an older child just learning how to play violin?

Older students will hopefully have **internalized good practice/study habits**. Some of the same techniques can be used from the tips listed above, but you'll need to upgrade your expectations. By middle school, most students should be capable of monitoring their own practice sessions, even if they are just beginning. It can be a great idea to invite them to play for you once in awhile.

Motivating via Performance

Some kids LOVE to show off. They'll pull out their instrument at the slightest provocation and play Twinkle any time, day or night.

With other children, you wouldn't even know that they know where their violin is. They barely mention it at all, and it would require the threat of a wedgie (please don't actually try this) to get them to perform in front of others.

Many times, **orchestra class** will have group performances, which is an excellent way to ease your kids into performing. Sometimes, tutors or private instructors will have recitals. Be sure to communicate with the tutor or private instructor to make sure it's in your child's best interest to perform. You know your child best.

Final notes about getting your child to practice his/her violin

Remember that your child will have good days and bad days. There will be days when the violin seems like it was the worst idea ever. On those days, remember that **they can come back and practice it another day or later**. Ultimately, playing the violin should be something they enjoy.

Every once in awhile, be sure to ask you child if how they play the violin hurts them physically in any way. There are mild aches and pains that are related to playing. Many of them are related to playing the violin wrong somehow, so pay attention to what they're telling you so you can help them with their playing position.

Also, **please do not to live vicariously through your child.** Write yourself a reality check and see if it bounces, so to speak. If you find yourself being the sole motivator for your child to practice and play violin, **especially for more than about 3 months,** violin may not be for your child. There's no reason you can't get lessons instead, though!

Your child may be better suited for another instrument. Violin is not for everyone. I started with viola, which suits me very well, and learned violin for fun. Let your child have the flexibility to figure out what suits them.

And finally, please remember that playing the violin is supposed to be what's called "hard fun". If your child never has fun playing the violin, then perhaps it's simply not the instrument they were meant to play. I've seen people switch from violin to cello or violin to viola who were **very happy with the change.** For some observations on what each stringed instrument in the orchestra does and how that impacts student players, please [click here](#).

Source: <http://www.learninghowtoplaytheviolin.com>