

Music Lessons: A Roller Coaster Ride

By Jennifer Foxx

It happens at least once a year, sometimes more. Students around the world feel it. BURNOUT. It can happen to the best of us, and happens quite often with music students. It is that time of year when students seem to quit music lessons left and right. They don't want to practice and parents don't want to fork over the money if they have to fight with their child to get them to practice.

So what do we do? First we have to realize this is completely normal. I have never known a student who has never experienced burnout and wanted to quit at some point in their musical studies. The beautiful weather outdoors, the friends in the neighborhood, the activities they dream of are all calling their name. Who wants to sit inside and practice when there is better things to do?

Music lessons are like taking a roller coaster ride. When a student first gets on the ride it's a new and exciting adventure. The ride starts slowly up the hill and pieces they are playing are easy. Practicing doesn't take a lot of effort and they are excited to begin. But shortly after the roller coaster is still trying to make it's way to the top the roller coaster stops and they are waiting for something to happen. This is the first stage of "Mom, I want to quit, I don't like to practice." The biggest mistake parents do at this stage is give in. After all, why spend all that money for something they don't want to do anymore? And even more, why fight with them on top of it?

This is the stage where they need some motivation. Encouragement is the biggest motivator at this stage. Set practice goals at home and be a part of their practicing experience. Play practice games with them, listen to them play. Go one step further and have a mini recital once a week before their lessons. Let them know that you enjoy hearing their progress and you are really proud of them. If the teacher has a studio incentive program, encourage them to earn the prize. Before you know it a few months have passed and they have gone over that first hill on the ride.

I highly recommend students do their practicing in the morning. If they wait until after school then there are so many other things that compete- homework, after school activities and family time. To add practicing in addition to everything else that needs to be done after school could get a little overwhelming at times. When I was a child taking piano lessons I was my family alarm clock. Once they heard me practicing the piano, everyone got up. If mornings are crazier than afternoons for your family, then adjust the practicing to where it will be the easiest and most productive time to do it.

Consistency is the key. Set a day/time for practicing and stick with it.

After students are enjoying the loops on the roller coaster again, which allows them to enjoy their playing at a steady pace, the pieces they are advancing to are starting to get hard again and before you know it there is another hill to climb. Don't worry, this is normal. This is when you ask if the pieces they are playing are motivating enough. This is important so they will want to work hard and get past the climb up and get back to enjoying the ride. Talk with your child and ask them if they are enjoying the pieces. If they aren't ask them what they would enjoy playing. Then talk with the teacher. Your music teacher is there to help you through this process. You may even find out after more investigating that it may be that it is not the music after all. Maybe your child is struggling with their note reading but has been able to slide by up until this point. It takes a team to raise a musician. The teacher, the parent and the student all have to work as a team. Be sure to always involve the teacher with ideas, problems and suggestions.

So now that we're back on track and things are a little easier on a downhill slope, you come to realize that the ups and downs of music lessons are normal. It's not easy to play an instrument but it is so worth it in the end regardless where your child goes in life because music lasts a lifetime. Whether they are an audience member at the symphony or on stage at Abravanel Hall, their music lessons should be something they can look back and say, I'm so glad my parents didn't let me quit.

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