Raising a Young Musician

by Rob Young

PreschoolProdigies.com
Introduction

In this guide, you will discover how to give your child a powerful musical head start. Even if you know nothing about music right now, this guide will arm you with the knowledge to give your child...

1. A well developed foundation for both pitch and rhythm (the fundamentals of music)
2. An inner desire to become a life-long learner
3. The gift of musical expression

Whether or not you play an instrument, the tools to give your children a strong musical foundation are within your grasp. Best of all, almost all of the tips, tricks and materials presented are either free or low-cost, and none of the methods here will not require you to run out and buy a piano or hire a private music instructor.

This guide is intended for:

1. Both musician and non-musician parents who want to give their child a jump start on his or her music education
2. Preschool teachers looking to bring more music into their classrooms
3. Music teachers interested in adding more early childhood music lessons & classes to their arsenal of teaching techniques
From this Guide You Will...

- Discover the unique musical advantage that young children possess
- Learn the fundamentals of music (notes names, pitch and rhythm)
- Acquire the tools and tips for teaching your child to sing in tune
- Acquire the tools and tips for developing your child’s sense of rhythm
- Understand the guiding principles behind the Preschool Prodigies® learning system and discover how you can use for making the most of your child’s musical development

Preschool Prodigies® is a series of animated music lessons for making early childhood music lessons colorful, accessible and fun. We’ll look at some of the free lessons toward the middle and end of this guide, so that you have some really effective music lessons to play for your child!

We’ll also look at plenty of materials, research and programs outside of Preschool Prodigies® so that it will ultimately be up to you to decide when and where to start your child’s musical journey.
The Cognitive Benefits of Playing a Musical Instrument

We aren’t going to focus much on the MASSIVE body of work concerning how playing a musical instrument benefits the brain. Now, I’m almost willing to bet that if you’ve purchased this book, you already know some of this information. With that in mind, you can feel free to skip to the next page.

If you are genuinely curious about exactly how playing a musical instrument benefits your brain, here’s one video you absolutely NEED to see.

It’s a TED Ed video by Anita Collins and it does an excellent job of explaining exactly how learning an instrument stimulates the brain. The link also includes some other great sources for information regarding the brain and music.

Instead of focusing on how playing an instrument affects the brain, we’re going to focus on how to engage in musical play. More specifically, we’re going to talk about a specific kind of musical play that will prepare your learners for more advanced musical concepts down the road the road.

A Quick Note on Music and Movement

The current trend in early music education is known as Music and Movement. It’s a combination of physical activity and music; for instance, songs like “Tooty Ta” and “If You’re Happy and You Know It” and in games like “musical chairs.”

I was a Music and Movement teacher for many years, and the philosophy and programs that focus on M&M have plenty of merit; however, it’s my personal opinion that the majority of early music curricula are missing the main ingredient for developing a strong sense of pitch (and therefore music).

Most early education music programs focus on things like scarves, shakers, drum sticks, movement, hula hoops and everyone’s favorite... bubbles! And for a long time, my music classes looked just like that! It’s the preschool music way. I spent hundreds if not thousands of hours playing freeze dance, singing about the wheels on the bus, dancing like a dinosaur, and having bubble dance parties. But in all of that, I was still missing the key ingredient to musical understanding.

There’s a really good chance that if you grew up speaking the English language, like my students, your child lacks this elusive ingredient for musical success!
No Speak-a-da-Music

I hate to be the one to tell you this, but if you grew up speaking English, or most other Western or Romantic languages, well then you actually grew up with a musical disadvantage.

I’m not saying that you’re not a wonderful musician. Or that you’re trapped in a musical nightmare because you speak English. It just means that you probably didn’t have the one distinct advantage of meaningful play with pitch during childhood.

Many of the languages spoken in America and Europe are non-tonal languages. This doesn’t mean everyone speaks in monotone (we use inflection all the time), but rather that pitching a word high or low doesn’t change the literal meaning of the word.

In a true tone language, however, the way you pitch a word controls the word’s literal meaning. For instance, in Mandarin Chinese, the seemingly simple word “ma” has four different meanings depending on how you pitch and contour this two letter word.

While that may seem foreign or strange to a speaker of English, around seventy percent of the world’s languages are actually tonal languages. While many of these pitch-based languages are only spoken by smaller native cultures, plenty of them are spoken on a larger scale.

What does this have to do with kids and music? Well, having strong control of pitch, both in terms reproducing pitches and identifying pitches, is at the core of developing a strong sense of music.

This quick comparison between tone cultures and non-tone cultures is the first step toward understanding exactly how you can maximize your child’s musical development.

Next, we’ll look at what’s really happening between these two groups of people and see what it means for your kids!
Perfect Pitch (Absolute Pitch)
The ability to identify and reproduce a note without an external reference.
Though this skill was popular among the great composers, the odds of having perfect pitch in America or Europe are 1 in 10,000.

In the world of music, having a strong sense of pitch is king! It will help your singing, your sight reading, your improvising, your composing and more! It also means you won’t get laughed at in your music classes (cue embarrassing flash backs to college).

In short, Perfect Pitch is the ability to identify or reproduce a musical note without a reference. In other words, you’ve memorized the sound of the musical notes.

While this is a good starting point, it helps to realize that Perfect Pitch is actually a range of musical skills that spans identifying single notes, determining the key of song, identifying chords, identifying intervals and more.

It has always been debated whether or not perfect pitch was a skill of nature (genetics or chance) or a skill of nurture (education). Thankfully for us, modern research has started to prove that this skill, like many others, can be taught and learned at a young age.

This is all best illustrated by the Perfect Pitch gap that exists between children who speak tonal languages and non-tonal languages, as we briefly discussed earlier. A 2004 UC San Diego study by Diana Deutsch compared the perfect pitch abilities of speakers of Mandarin Chinese to U.S. non-tonal speakers, the results of which will lead us to a massive music education breakthrough.

“… of students who had begun musical training between ages 4 and 5, approximately 60 percent of the Chinese speakers tested as having perfect pitch, while only about 14 percent of U.S. nontone language speakers did. For those who had begun training between 6 and 7, approximately 55 percent of the Chinese and 6 percent of the U.S. met the criterion. And for those beginning between 8 and 9, the figures were 42 percent of the Chinese and zero of the U.S. group.”

– Diana Deutsch, UC San Diego 2004

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“Deutsch acknowledges that it still remains to be discovered why and how it is that some speakers of non-tone languages – Mozart, Sinatra et al., as well as Deutsch herself – have perfect pitch. She expects it to be related to either an exceptionally long “critical window” for language (and tone) acquisition, a very early musical upbringing, or both.

The research suggests, Deutsch said, that parents who want their kids to acquire perfect pitch should expose them to musical tones together with their verbal labels from infancy onwards.”

- Inga Kiderra; Tone Language is Key to Perfect Pitch (May 19, 2009)
The Unique Musical Advantage of Young Children: Meaningful Play with Pitch during the Critical Period for Auditory Development

Looking at Deutsch’s study, you are reminded of the idea of a “critical window” for language and tone development. We all sort of know that, from our own native languages, we all learned our native language and it may have felt effortless compared to the second language we learned.

Which brings us back to the idea of giving children “meaningful play with pitch during the critical window for auditory development.” The hypothesis that Deutsch (and several others) proved true is that by giving children this kind of play with pitch during their early years, that you can directly impact their Perfect Pitch abilities.

THIS is your child’s unique musical advantage, that their brain is eager to experience, categorize and learn the sounds of music and that learning the sounds at this age will give them a life-long understanding.

What’s even better about giving children meaningful play with pitch during the critical window for auditory development is that it focuses on the greatest learning tool children have...play.

While it takes a trained musician to run an ensemble, teach music theory or teach a complicated instrument like the guitar, all it takes to get meaningful and memorable experiences with pitch is PLAY!

This is what will allow you to facilitate so much musical development in your child. You won’t have learn to read music, play an instrument and then turn around and teach your kids. You just have to focus on meaningful play with individual notes.

If you think about the musical sounds like colors, it’s not so crazy to imagine kids learning to identify, sort and combine them in seemingly natural way. Afterall, the musical notes are just another, easily discernable stimuli for your brain to categorize and identify.

If you’d like to read more about the idea of meaningful exposure to pitch, check out this article on the Preschool Prodigies blog. It dives deep into how and when the human race discovered the color “blue” and explains how we’re going through a similar process now in becoming more acute to individual musical stimuli.
If you have any doubts about your ability to put your child on the road to perfect pitch, it may be a comfort to know that parents and teachers have been doing it since the eighties (likely even earlier).

As far as I have discovered, The Taneda Method is the most successful Absolute Pitch course for preschoolers. It was from their method that I first read about “meaningful exposure to individual notes.”

While the research and the method are both amazing, the method is not commonly taught and it only has three U.S. based teachers as of 2017. Plus, the system requires a lot of one-on-one interaction from a trained teacher and a piano, all which can be expensive and difficult for families and classrooms to come by. That’s why we created Preschool Prodigies, to combine “meaningful exposure to individual notes” with a fun, accessible and modern program.

There is a common belief that playing classical music for children will build their musical and creative intelligence. While the beauty, history and technical ability in classical music makes it complex, amazing and wonderful, simply listening to classical music doesn’t constitute meaningful exposure to individual notes. In most compositions, there is too much happening with too little context for a child to pick out individual notes or to find meaning in the contour of a melody.

It’s like teaching your child the letters of the alphabet with Shakespeare. Even though Shakespeare’s play have lots of individual letters and words in them, it doesn’t mean that children will learn to speak or read simply by looking at or even listening to Shakespeare plays. Your better bet is to read books like “See Spot Run” and sing simple songs like “The ABCs.” It’s all about building the fundamental blocks at this age.
What Age and Which Instrument?

I get asked a lot “when should I start music lessons with my kids?” The short answer is now!

That the short way of saying that every age, there are activities, habits, games and routies that you can implement to boost your child’s musical and cognitive development.

The quick and dirty progression of a child’s musical development could look something like this. Note that the **suggestions in bold focus on meaningful play with pitch during the critical years of auditory development**.

**Infants and Babies**: Play gentle and varied styles of music / Practice clapping and tapping with a steady beat / **Sing simple melodies and lullabies** / Enroll in a local baby-and-me style music class / **Explore deskbells or handbells with supervision** / Baby friendly noise makers

**Toddlers**: **Free play with deskbells** / Music and movement songs and games / Singing simple songs and radio favorites / **Solfege Hand Signs** / **Preschool Prodigies and Playtime Prodigies Materials** / BrillKids Little Musician Program

**Preschoolers**: **Guided play with deskbells via Preschool Prodigies** / Songbooks and worksheets about **basic musical concepts** / Freeplay and story telling (imaginative play) with deskbells or Boomwhackers / **Solfege Hand Signs** / **Reading color coded sheet music** / **Basic songwriting with simple patterns of color** / Music and movement / Piano instruction if your child is particularly capable with their music lessons

**School Age Children**: Private music lessons on piano/guitar/preferred instrument / Basic piano knowledge is important / General music classes in elementary school / Band/Orchestra classes in late elementary school / Practice with both color coded music and black and white music / Apps like GarageBand, Piano Maestro, Figure and beyond / Learning pop music chords for favorite songs.

While many of the school-age activities focus on meaningful play with pitch, by age 7 or 8 the critical window for developing a strong sense of perfect pitch starts to close.

This is just the quick and easy version of what your child’s musical journey might look like. If you’d like some further reading on this subject, [check out another epic post from our blog](#).
The ABCs Of Music

The musical alphabet consists of twelve unique pitches. Seven of those pitches (pictured above) we identify using the letters A through G. These make up the key of C Major and can easily be found on the white keys on a piano.

The other five notes (i.e. the black keys) are either Sharps(#) or Flats(b) of those seven initial notes (i.e. Bb, C#, F#, etc).

While the letter names are the golden standard for note names, identifying black and white letters is time consuming and difficult for young kids, but by color coding the notes, we arm learners of all ages and levels to start playing their instruments quickly.

The advantage of using color-coded notes for preschoolers is simple. Many two and three-year-olds can distinguish the colors red and yellow much faster than they can distinguish the letters C and E. Furthermore, when reading music, having color-coded notes means preschoolers don’t have to understand standard music notation (i.e. which note goes on which line), which is a skill better learned by school age children.

“Color is one of the first ways your preschooler makes distinctions among things she sees... children (and adults!) use color as a means for defining and organizing the world.”

- “Why Colors and Shapes Matter” by Ellen Booth Church
Above you can see Mr. Rob and his buddy Zach Ladin rocking out with a bunch of kids using the Chromanotes Instrument, Boomwhackers®. Here at Preschool Prodigies, we used the Chromanotes™ colors in all of our materials, which allows you to use these awesome instruments. Plus, plenty of teachers already use color coded instruments (like the Boomwhackers® pictured above), so they will have an easy time working with our materials. And of course, any preschooler who learns this system will be ahead of the game when it comes time for Boomwhackers® in their elementary school music class.

While coloring the notes are a big help, keep in mind that the colors themselves are more or less arbitrary (they make up a ROYGBIV-ish rainbow from C to c). In other words, we're not suggesting the colors create true synesthesia (which is the rare phenomena of seeing sound and/or hearing sights). We're just using the colors to make musical play more memorable, error-proof and fun and to help you and your kids distinguish the subtle nuances of pitch.

If you want a little bit more information about ins and outs of color-coded music check out The Ins and Outs of Color Coded Music on the Prodigies Blog.

As we're choosing to focus on pitch development, we'll start out by ignoring some of the normal fundamentals. We'll get to all of the general music fundamentals (like reading music on the treble clef, note lengths, black and white music, etc.) down the road.

While rhythm and pitch are inseparable to a good composition, preschool aged children tend to do better by focusing on either one or the other (which is why we have separate video lessons for rhythmic and tonal concepts). It is of course great if your Young Musician can play his or her melodies with an intentional rhythm, but that is not essential to giving them a strong sense of pitch. We'll touch back with rhythm later, I promise!
Teaching Your Kids to Sing in Tune

In a more practical sense, meaningful play with pitch will help your child learn to sing in tune. In this section, we’re going to look at two practical ways to start getting your kids singing in tune!

The Curwen Hands Signs (aka The Solfege Hand Signs)

Not only do the musical notes each have a color and a letter name, but they also have a Solfege name. The 7 different syllables for the 7 different notes we discussed earlier are shown below!

Free Video Lessons Featuring The Solfege Hand Signs

If you want to get your kids involved, head over to this blog post that’s all about singing in tune. There you’ll find a video (pictured below) that will introduce you and your kids to the Solfege Hand Signs.

Once you’ve met the Solfege Hand Signs, head over to PsP Melodies for a little bit of extra practice.

The blog post also contains more activities you can do, games you can play and tools you can use for teaching your child to sing in tune!

The Solfege Hand Signs are a BIG component of the Prodigies Playground®, and as awesome as the PsP Melodies are, they’re not even close to the musical goodness that goes down inside the Prodigies Playground®.
Singing in Tune Part II: The #1 Musical Instrument for Young Kids

When it comes to singing in tune, you need a good reference to work with. And when it comes to your child’s first musical instrument, you’re going to want something between a toy and a pro instrument. That way it sounds good and they can grow into it a bit, but if they decide it’s not for them, you didn’t break the bank on a Stradivarius.

For those reasons (and many others) these deskbells are THE #1 Instrument for Young Kids. They’re durable, they’re well-tuned and the individual nature of the bells means lots of meaningful play with individual notes.

But even on a more basic level, if you want to learn to sing in tune, you need a reference to work with. If you have a piano and you’re willing to work one-on-one with your kids, that’s awesome! But if you’re looking for a more free-play approach, I cannot encourage the deskbells enough.

With the bells, you and your kids can play songs about the colors, about the letters and about the numbers (1 through 8). As you sing along, your brain will naturally try to start singing the same note. Singing in tune with the bell is literally the practice of getting your voice to vibrate at the same speed (frequency) as the bell (and the air around it). If you have a higher or lower voice than the note you’re trying to sing (i.e. it feels uncomfortable to sing) you can sing at either double or half the frequency (like .5x or 2x) to get the same note in a different octave.

For now, don’t worry too much about the physics of sound, just know that if you keep practicing with an individual note, you will eventually find the note with your voice and know what it feels like to sing in tune.

If you want more specifics, like good vocal warm ups, a tuner for checking your pitch, or some basic practice material, head back over to this psuedo epic blog post about singing in tune!
PsP Bell App: An Affordable and Digital Alternative

Obviously learning to play an instrument on a real life instrument is going to work better than learning to play on an app!

HOWEVER... the PsP Bell App gives you a shipping free and super-affordable alternative to needing to buy your first instrument right away. It will give you a colorful way to learn and talk about the musical notes, and it will give you an instrument you can use with any of our free music lessons.

The sound of the bell is actually a carefully blended sound of a glockenspiel, a piano and a tone rich synthesizer, so it rings out a very clean and full note that is easy to latch onto for singing.

The bell instrument has several modes of play, and we included different instrument configurations that will work well with the different lessons in the PsP Curriculum.

For instance, if you’re practicing a lesson with the C, E and G bells, there’s an option for an instrument that has just those notes! That way there’s less room for error.

Check out the PsP Bells App inside the iOS App Store Today!
Actionable Ideas to Facilitate Meaningful Play with Pitch

Below are actionable ideas for bringing a genuine and effective music education into your home or classroom.

Note: Many of these ideas will require some kind of musical instrument and some of them are specific to the bells we recommend. If you get creative, you can definitely apply many of the ideas here to other instruments.

**Practice Simple Melodies with the Solfege Hand Signs**

Don’t forget to visit some of the free episode inside [PreschoolProdigies.com/melodies](http://www.preschoolprodigies.com/melodies) to get some practice hand-signing with the Solfege syllables. This will attach a concrete bi-lateral motion to the abstract idea of pitch and improve your child's overall sense of pitch. It will probably improve your singing, too!

**Use Short Melodies to Serve as Cues for your Child**

If you play C (red), A (purple), F (green), you might recognize it as the NBC jingle. Short melodies like that are easily remembered and very distinguishable. Giving your Young Musician exposure and knowledge of short melodies is a great way to build their musical ear. You could try playing C - E - G (a C major triad) to signal that it’s time to eat, or you could try playing the whole C major scale (C D E F G A B c) as a cue for bedtime. The earlier you can build musical notes into your child’s life and routine, the better.

**Incorporate Bells into your Young Musician’s Freeplay**

The red bell makes an excellent fire truck bell, and the orange bell works well in a fruit salad. The yellow bell can be the lemonade stand bell and the purple bell can be a bath-time boat bell. This will give your child frequent exposure to individual pitches during play, which is when children learn best.

**Play Listening Games with Your Child**

Using the bells, Boomwhackers or a piano, pick two or three (to start) musical notes. Play them each several times with your Young Musician. Then highlight the notes from view and see if your child can guess which note you are playing. You can frame this as Hangman, Bingo or simply drill one note at a time. At first, help your child by leading them and giving them multiple tries.

- Good starting sets are C D E, C F G, C E G, D F A, G A B, A B c, & C G c

**Listen to and Talk about Music**

It doesn’t take a record producer to recognize the different instruments and different elements of a song. Talk with your child about the music you both enjoy, they’ll come to understand the elements of music faster and with more certainty (i.e. “here’s the guitar solo”, “this is the chorus which is the part that repeats a lot and makes you want to sing along”, “did you hear the crazy drum fill?”, “when these two people sing together, they make harmony”, etc.).

**Join the Preschool Prodigies Playground**

We have free lessons inside PsP Melodies and our Free Starter Program, but if you’re serious about your child’s music education, The Prodigies Playground awaits!

The Playground contains the full length “Preschool Prodigies” program, which is over 70 videos that take all of the concepts we’ve seen in this book to the next level. There are even additional videos coming out inside later levels like “Primary Prodigies” and we have a 100% Satisfaction Guarantee! Start your child’s musical journey today!

**Play your Child Instrumental Versions of Songs they Already Know**

This will help your child bridge the idea of lyrics and melody, as well increase their confidence when they realize they can recognize a song without lyrics. Jazz versions of holiday songs (I’d recommend Bela Fleck and The Flecktone’s Jingle All The Way) or instrumental covers of popular music (check out the Pickin’ On Series) are a good place to start.

**Invest in at Least One Instrument for your Child**

The colorful deskbells we sell are a solid bet, we promise! If you get a set that for whatever reason doesn’t work, we will replace the broken bells! A piano with Chromanotes stickers is a solid substitute as well, just a little less guided and kid-Friendly. Stay away from toy guitars for now! For more information on instrument choice for Young Musicians, visit our blog.

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The Blue’s Clues Effect - The Benefits and Joy of Repetition

Remember the TV show Blue’s Clues? If you do, you might also remember that the show only aired one new episode each week. A new episode aired Monday and repeated throughout the week. In combination with great content and a great host, this kind of scheduling made Blue’s Clues rather legendary in children’s television.

Though it might seem strange to watch the same episode five times in a row, children enjoy and thrive off repetition. After all, what kid doesn’t want to watch their favorite movie ten, twenty, one hundred times?

Children enjoy that kind of repetition because they experience comfort in having a sense of knowledge. Because so much of the world is still new and unpredictable to a child, they take a great deal of pride and satisfaction in both having information and sharing that information (which is kind of why preschoolers will fervently share trivial details or random things that they overheard).

In the case of puzzle based show like Blue’s Clues, children become more and more comfortable with the clues and the hints so that by the end of the week, their confidence and enjoyment skyrocket!

Inside the Prodigies Playground, we pair this love of repetition with the critical window for auditory development to give you a powerful and effective way to develop your child’s musical ear. It’s our more long-term goal here at Preschool Prodigies that this kind of education will help bridge the perfect pitch gap that exists between speakers of tone languages and speakers of non-tone languages, and hopefully lead to a more musically literate society.
Suzuki Method & Preschool Prodigies

The Suzuki method is one of the most influential and successful methods in music education. The method involves the instructor teaching children musical pieces one note at a time, while the children commit the finger positions and passages to memory. This is considered “learning by rote.”

Though rote learning and strict memorization is often frowned upon as an “old-school” method, there are very legitimate benefits to this kind of learning. While some teachers might create a strict and disciplined environment, with the right teacher, this kind of learning can actually be creative and fun.

The Suzuki method focuses on teaching children how to physically finger the piece on their instrument BEFORE they ever try to read it on paper. This is because the actual playing of the passage fosters understanding of the written music. That way when you try to read it off the page, you have a reference for the sound and the movements that create each note.

This is part of the Suzuki method largely because standard music notation is difficult to read and overwhelming for young children; therefore, by only showing children the notation AFTER they have already played it, the kids can come to understand what is written based on what they just played. In other words, “I just played C, E and D, so these three weird looking note things must mean C, E and D”).

While this seems in contrast to what we are suggesting, it’s actually very much the same.

Even though we use sheet music right out of the gate, it’s color coded and more icon-based. Like Suzuki does via rote teaching, the color-coded notes and simplified music help facilitate the physical playing of a piece instead of the frustrating reading of a piece.
If You Want Sweet Beets... A Brief Introduction to Rhythm

We talked A LOT about pitch in this book, but before we wrap up, I wanted to touch briefly on rhythm. Secretly, I’m hoping you’ll come learn a lot more about rhythm inside the Prodigies Playground, but for now, here are some quick tips for developing your child’s sense for rhythm!

1) With babies and toddlers, be gentle and all, but you can start by helping them clap their hands together in a steady rhythmic clap. You can count some numbers, sing a favorite lullaby or tap along with some music.

2) As kids become more mobile, you can try stomping or clapping in time with faster songs, with music and movement style games like “The Wheels on the Bus,” “A Tooty Ta,” “Happy and You Know It” and “Head Shoulders Knees Toes.”

3) You should definitely play simple hand games like patty cake because it will provide a model for your kids and a little bit of social pressure as well.

4) If your family does Rock ‘n Roll, you should definitely try tapping and clapping along with the infamous beginning of Queen’s “We Will Rock You.” You should also probably have a pots and pans jam sesh with a loud stereo and any song with a good beat. Just sayin’...

5) Don’t focus too much on reading rhythms at first. Proper notation is difficult to learn for young kids, but easy to learn later. Plus, the actual sense for rhythm is developed early!

6) And last but not least, check out the very first Preschool Prodigies video, Sweet Beets! It’s sure to get your kids tapping and clapping in no time.
Practice Is Perfect

“If there is any sure route to success and fulfillment in life, it is to be found in the long-term, essentially goalless process of mastery.”

- George Leonard, Mastery

If you’ve spent as much as five minutes with a three-year-old, you can probably imagine that getting him or her to practice music in the traditional “sit-down and the play the piano” sense might prove a somewhat difficult task.

This is a common fear among preschool parents. Though it’s true that preschool-aged children tend to have both high energy and a short attention span, they are most certainly capable of engaging in meaningful music practice.

My drum teacher used to tell me to “Strive for excellence. Enjoy the process.” Similarly, you’ll often hear preschool teachers encourage the idea of “process, not product.”

This means that if your Young Musician doesn’t play “Hot Cross Buns” right on the first, third or even tenth time, that’s okay. Not only is practicing music giving them that meaningful exposure to individual notes, but they are also developing their voice, their motor skills, their coordination and their patterning abilities. Hopefully, they’re also having fun!
"Your brain at positive performs significantly better than it does at negative, neutral or stressed. Your intelligence rises, your creativity rises, your energy levels rise."

- Shawn Achor, Harvard Researcher

I’ve heard from a lot of parents about how much they hated piano lessons as a kid and about how they wish they didn’t quit. Don’t give your kids that experience... arm them to see it through by making it fun!

I’m not saying don’t take piano lessons. You totally should. And so should your kids. I’m just saying that you need to focus on the process, not the product. Aim to foster a genuine love and curiosity for music by playing music in the car (alternating song choice is a fun game), by going to live concerts, by visiting your local music store and on the whole, doing whatever makes sense to keep their curiosity alive.

With that in mind, here are four pieces of practical advice on practicing, to hopefully help you keep your session fun and fruitful for you and your kids! As far as what you should be practicing, start with the activities and videos mentioned so far, or if you’re ready to commit, join the Prodigies Playground.

**4 Practice Time Techniques That Work**

1. Practice at least 10-15 Minutes Everyday
   Short, yet daily practice is better than long occasional practice. I often set up busy families with the goal of doing five out of seven days. Also, any practice time is good, so ignore any excuses to postpone practicing and just go for it. Practice is perfect.

2. A Child’s Attention Span is About 5 Minutes for Every Year of Age
   When practicing, have several music activities ready to jump to. Move around the room, keep it high energy, whatever you can do to expand your child’s practice time beyond their initial burst of attention (first we play the bells, then we play a listening game, then we play some drums, and we finish up with some piano or dancing).

3. Reward Your Child For Practicing
   You know your Young Musician best, so find the reward system that works for you. All of the PsP sheet music has blank stars near the title. Fill in one star each time you practice and add more stars as you need. You want to make sure that your child isn’t only practicing for the reward (you want them to inherently enjoy the process), but for many children, building the feeling of accomplishment in some kind of tangible way is encouraging and fun.

4. Find a Consistent Time To Practice
   (right after school, right before dinner, etc.)
   Consistency is not only the key to improvement, but it builds positive learning habits that your Young Musician will benefit from in every aspect of their future. Furthermore, your Young Musician will know what to expect and easily form a routine.
The Lifelong Benefit of a Music Education

“I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.”

- Plato

Most musicians, even young ones, learn to understand the process of mastery (even if just a little bit) while learning their instrument.

Even if you don’t get past middle-school jazz band, playing an instrument for 2-3 years will develop your creative problem solving, your ability to learn new skills and your confidence in your ability to practice and perfect.

As Plato said, music contains the patterns and the keys to learning. My music education has given me both the ability to succeed at my work and love what I’m doing. Maybe it’s because every industry and every field has its instrument and its road to mastery, and music is simply a fun first toe into the process of learning.

Or maybe it’s because the idea of pitch and rhythm are fundamental to our language and our communications and our emotions. Or because both hemispheres of the brain are shooting off fireworks when you play an instrument.

Or maybe it’s because listening to your favorite song has that heart pumping effect that makes you feel invincible.

Either way, the world is filled with instruments of all kinds, and we hope that some of the resources and tips here will help you and your kids go begin your musical journey with confidence and joy!
Take Aways for You

Below is a summary of the actionable ways to take advantage of your child’s critical period for musical development:

☐ Provide your child with an appropriate musical instrument (we recommend the C Major Deskbells)
☐ Provide your child with meaningful exposure to individual pitches both through practice and through free play with their instrument
☐ Establish a parent-and-me music-time routine
☐ Establish a solo music routine for your child (10-15+ minutes a day)
☐ Encourage, support and foster a love for music; don’t force it upon your child
☐ Focus on the process of learning music, not the product
☐ If you are an iPad user, download age appropriate musical apps for your child (reviews and suggestions can be found on our blog)
☐ Expose your child to all kinds of music (not just what’s on the radio)
☐ Use Spotify to easily search a massive catalog, a few personal suggestions for stuff you won’t find on pop radio are Classical (Mozart & Chopin), Jazz (Coltrane), North Indian (Ravi Shankar), Latin (Buena Vista Social Club), Instrumental Holiday (Bela Fleck’s Jingle All The Way), Bluegrass (Earl Scruggs), World (Paul Simon’s Graceland)
☐ Check out the Prodigies Playground demo and maybe even join the Playground.
☐ Talk to your child’s school and teacher about their music curriculum, so you know what they are receiving musically at school

Elliot Eisner, a professor of education at Stanford University, offers a broad perspective on how art impacts a child’s life:

“The arts teach children that problems can have more than one solution and that questions can have more than one answer. The arts celebrate multiple perspectives. One of the large lessons kids can learn from practicing the arts is that there are many ways to see and interpret the world.”

In my life, music has opened so many of the doors. Music taught me the patterns and habits that keep me excited about learning something new in every phase of my life, and I hope that you and your child can discover similar joys on your musical adventure.

If you made it this far, I sincerely hope that you and your kids have a blast using Preschool Prodigies! If you have any questions, visit our FAQ, or feel free to contact me at Mr.Rob@PreschoolProdigies.com.

Happy Musicing,

- Mr. Rob
Additional Resources

Recommended iPad Apps

(Many of these apps are geared toward elementary school children - in fact most of them will require either parent help or a slightly older child)

Toca Band: children drag different instruments (in the shapes of animals, people, objects) onto a stage and the instruments play together. By putting an instrument in the solo spot, the child can then solo over the rest of the orchestra on that instrument. Very entertaining and though a little repetitive after a while, the melody is indeed catchy and it is definitely a good musical game for even the youngest iPad users.

StoryBots: a cute instrument that uses different robots to create different pitches. I like this app because it sticks to the C Major scale (like the bells) and because the song mode is easy to follow and age appropriate.

Baby Chords and Kids Music123; both have easy to play instruments that can give your child individual exposure to individual notes.

Figure: though not specific to children, is easy to use and allows a good deal of exploration with different instruments, beat making, and playing error-free melodies.

GarageBand: one of Apple’s most popular music workstations, GarageBand allows you to record and program entire songs. While complex for a preschooler to navigate, the smart instruments are a good way to expose children to chords and logical beats, and they most likely will get a huge kick out of the sampler instrument.

PianoMaestro: an amazing guided piano program that will drastically improve your child’s ability to read music. Best of all, it works with a real piano (via listening on the iPad mic) AND they recently made all of the content free.

GuitarBots: guided guitar instruction that is similar to PianoMaestro. An amazing app and highly recommended for any guitar student.

DM1: a drum step sequencer that lets the user create interesting beats simply by tapping on a grid.

Melodica (iPhone app): a step sequencer that lets the user easily create simple melodies.

Smule Ocarina: a fun to play a flute type instrument that requires you to blow into the device’s microphone to make sound.

Kim Chandler’s Funky & Fun Vocal Exercises: a CD series available only through her website, these are a great resource for any aspiring vocalist or vocal student.

Drum School: a logical presentation of drum beats that shows both the notated music along with video of the beat being played - a definite must for any aspiring drummer.

Perfect Pitch Education and Research

Tone Language Translates To Perfect Pitch: Mandarin Speakers More Likely To Acquire Rare Musical Ability
The Taneda Method for Absolute Pitch Education: We Hear and Play
Diana Deutsch’s Eye Opening Research on Perfect Pitch
Speaking Tonal Languages Promotes Perfect Pitch

The Benefits of a Musical Education

PBS: The Importance of a Music Education
Forbes: Piano Lessons Make Your Smarter
First Evidence That Musical Training Affects Brain Development
How Music Influences Brain Development
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