



Episode 17: Encouragement for Teens with Christine Goodner

This episode is kicking off a new, special feature on the podcast where the first episode of each month will be a short mini pep talk. These short episodes will focus on some of the topics I often talk to students, families, and teachers about. Today's pep talk is all about the topic of encouragement, specifically, how we can encourage the teen music students in our lives.

When our children are young, it can be more obvious what they need from us in order to help them with music practice. That might include:

- helping structure the practice itself
- reminders to practice
- scheduling practice in the family schedule to begin with
- reminders to stay on task
- reminders to be sure to cover all of the assignments the teacher has given from the lesson
- sometimes we're helping our younger students with focusing on quality practice rather than rushing through their practice.

It's often the little details of actually getting practice done.

As our children get older and they can take care of many of these scheduling and executing practice details themselves, we can begin to wonder if we're needed in the process anymore.

And I would say the answer to that varies a lot depending on your child and their specific needs, but it may be that you are less and less needed for the actual practice to take place.

Maybe your child goes into the music room or their bedroom or wherever practice happens, and they just take care of the details of practice (on their own).

So, what is our role then as the adults in the family? It's great when our children can be independent and have quality effective practice (while being independent). But I think it's also important to know that we still have an important role in our child's musical development.

Part of that role could be (these) three things that come to my mind right away.

First is logistics. Sometimes we are in charge of getting our children places or see that they have ways to get places and having the equipment and materials they need.

I think helping create a musical and motivating environment for our child, whether that's in our families or in other activities they get to participate in.

And then the third that comes to mind for me is the role of encourager.

And that is what we are going to talk more about in detail today, since we're talking about teenagers specifically, I can't talk about this topic without recommending a great book, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* by Daniel Siegel MD.

This is the author of *The Whole Brain Child* (also highly recommended), and it's an excellent book about the teenage brain and some of the things that are happening with our teens and their brain development and emotional development.

I think reading it can be a really great way to reframe some of the thoughts we might've grown up with about teenagers. And there's one specific quote. I really love to read it's coming from page four. The author says "adolescence is not a period of being quote crazy or quote. Immature is an essential time of emotional intensity, social engagement and creativity."

And throughout this book, one thing that does come up from the author is that music is really a great way for teens to experience some of these things. We can experience intense emotions by both playing and listening to music. We have this social connection through music: often through our orchestras, through our group classes, through our interactions with our music teacher.

And then also creativity: music gives us an outlet for creativity. So, music is such a great thing for teens to be involved with . . . as are other activities as well. But in music, we have an opportunity to sort of tap into these things that teens are really craving and wanting to experience, and it gives us a productive outlet to experience some of those in a really wonderful way.

So again, that book is called *Brainstorm* by Daniel Siegel, and I will put a link to it in our show notes. I highly recommend that as a resource, if you are listening to this and think you might want to learn more about how to work with the teens in your family, or that you work with in your teaching life.

So, I wanted to share some specific things that we can say and do to encourage the teens in our lives, because sometimes I know as a parent, with two kids in their twenties now, having raised two teenagers, sometimes they didn't always appreciate outwardly to me in the moment that they enjoyed my encouragement (laughs).

And sometimes it felt a little uncomfortable or like I'm saying in this thing, that I do actually believe, but maybe my child is not interested in me saying to them.

So I think having some ideas of the kinds of things that can be encouraging to the teens in our lives can be really helpful. This next set of examples comes from an article I wrote a few years back. I recently

reshared the graphic from it on Instagram. A lot of people responded positively and I wanted to share some of those ideas on the podcast.

Let's start with a few ideas of encouraging things to say.

I do think it's important to be authentic and to really believe what we're saying, as words of encouragement. I think it's also very important to be specific. If we just say "good job", I think that can sometimes come across as less meaningful than if we are giving encouragement in a more specific way.

So here are some suggestions

- I'm proud of you.
- I love hearing you play.
- I see how hard you're working.
- Growing up is hard.
- You're still learning.
- It will get easier.
- I can see you or hear you improving.
- I'm so impressed that you are making time to keep playing or keep practicing.
- Your dedication inspires me.
- How can I help?
- It takes a lot of guts to get up there and play.

That's a short list of ideas. And hopefully listening to me say them prompts some other ideas of what you might want to say.

Definitely change your language, to (make it) feel like something you would actually say and what your child is needing for encouragement. Whether it's getting up and performing, or just being reminded that we can see the hard work they're doing, or we see that it's taking an effort to make time, to keep participating in music or keep practicing, and we are proud of the effort that's going in.

I think it can always be an effective strategy to praise the effort and the hard work, rather than just the outcome or some kind of perfectionist ideal.

So, if I could give one tip, I would say, praise the effort, praise the hard work that you see happening in front of you, and let your child or students know that you see them and you see the hard work they're putting in.

In addition to things we can say to be encouraging to our teens, I also wanted to share a few ideas of things that we can do. Here's a short list of suggestions.

- First. I think one of the big things we can do is help our team get to their rehearsals and their lessons on time, help arrange transportation if anything comes up and just make sure they get where they're needed so they can keep going with their, with their work on their instrument.
- You can leave your child a note of encouragement. I think this is sometimes what I would do. Sometimes I would write a short note and stick it in my daughter's backpack or leave it in their room. And just a short note of encouragement can go a really long way.
- Taking your team to see live performances. That's becoming more possible again these days, as things open up. There's a number of wonderful performances that could be streamed in the living room and watched as a family. Performances can be such a great motivator and helping provide opportunities for that for our musical teams is great.
- Be your teen's biggest fan : show up at their performances and give lots of positive feedback every chance you get.
- Help your teen find recordings of great music to listen to.
- Talk to them about their goals! Recently Chenoa Murphy came on the podcast and talked about her mother, talking to her about her goals with music and what she was going to do before going to college. And I think whether or not our child is going to be a professional musician, finding out what are their goals . . . maybe they want to play in an orchestra at their college. Maybe they want to play at their church or place of worship. There could be all sorts of goals with music that don't include a career in music. And having those conversations is a great way to encourage our child's interests and see what they might be interested in doing with their music in the future.
- Compliment your child on what they're doing well! Often it's very easy to get messages from media, peers, all over the place, as teens, that are less than positive or that unfortunately cause us to compare ourselves to others. And I know from my own experience as a teen and speaking to many teens, sometimes it's really easy to feel like we don't measure up somehow. And so having encouraging adults in our lives, pointing out all the things that are going well is really important for teens.

I think one of the benefits of our teens becoming more independent with practices that we no longer have to be the ones monitoring, “oh, that's actually a, C-sharp not a C-natural” or “check your posture” or whatever other things that we use to help with in home practice.

Now we can leave those things to our child's teacher (because they are doing them relatively well on their own) and we can just be positive and encouraging . We can point out what we think is going well and keep the relationship around music a super positive encouraging one.

As I was preparing to record this episode, I asked on my Instagram (@Suzukitriangle) “what is the most encouraging thing someone can say to you now as an adult about your own practice or performance?”

I was curious to find out if some of these things that I recommend as being encouraging for teens would also be encouraging for adults and musicians currently.

So I wanted to share a few of those with you. A lot of them are very specific kinds of things that people say to them that they find encouraging, or that they say to themselves.

I wanted to share a few (I'm leaving them anonymous for now), so that you might think about the fact that while teens will find these things, encouraging just humans, find them encouraging.

And I think sometimes just thinking about how we would feel encouraged ourselves can give us information about how we might encourage our teen . . . of course, including what we know about their own personality and what encourages them in general.

So here are a couple of the responses that I got from that question about what is most encouraging to you now as an adult musician:

- One person said “to myself I say: begin where you are and trust what you know.”
- Someone else said that “I love to hear that someone saying: ‘I really enjoyed your playing’”. They commented that it really helps them feel like they made someone happy with their music, which they feel like is their main goal.
- Someone else said they like to tell themselves: “just start” or “sometimes done is better than perfect.”
- Another encouraging comment that someone shared was when people say to them: “thank you for sharing your thoughts, or your artistic gifts, or your time.”
- Another responder said that really it's the same thing that encourages teens (mentioned above) that encourages them now. And that often they spend a lot of time encouraging their students and other people, but they're less on the receiving end of things.

I think from some of these comments that it's really important to note how important encouragement is. I think we learned to do it for ourselves, and also an encouraging word from somebody can really spark our enthusiasm and help us feel like all the effort and work we're putting in is paying off. (And) that people are seeing that effort and the result of what we want to share through our music.

Another response to my question was from somebody who said they were playing in a benefit concert and were told that their playing was emotive and authentic. And they felt the love that was being shared through the performance on the instrument. They commented what an amazing response that is because that's exactly what this performer wanted to share.

And then one more response I'll share. Someone said it really encouraged them when someone said, “wow, that really reminds me of . . . ” and that statement really helps them tell that something that they played or share through their music was helping make a personal connection to somebody else's life.

So you can see that a lot of those are very specific comments. It's not just “good job. That was great.” I think a lot of the encouragement was either I see the work you're doing or the work you just did, or the

performance you just gave or the music you just shared touched me in some personal way, or it made me feel something.

And I think that is something that musicians are always trying to achieve.

So those are a few of the comments that were shared with me when I asked that question, thank you for anybody who I quoted anonymously, just now thank you for sharing your thoughts.

And I think it's a good reminder that we all needed encouragement.

So as we head off into our weeks this week and think about this topic of encouragement, I would just encourage you to look around you and see who's working hard, sharing something beautiful, communicating something through their music . . . whether it's your child or your child's teacher, or your students, or a colleague, and maybe we can all be an encouragement to each other because it's so important for helping us feel seen and keeping us motivated.

Before we go... If you would like to add your comments about what encourages you I'll invite you to find me on Instagram, I will leave my Instagram handle in the show notes its @Suzukitriangle, and you can find our conversation about that on that platform. You're also welcome to send me an email at timetopracticepodcast@gmail.com. I'd love to hear your feedback on what encourages you as a musician or what you see encourages your own musicians.