



Episode 52: Six Tips for Getting Back to our Fall Practice Routine

with Barbie Wong

Christine Goodner:

Welcome everyone. I'm really excited today to be here with Barbie Wong and Barbie came on the podcast in episode 43 and we did a full - more long form interview in that episode.

So please go back and listen to that if you haven't heard it yet, because Barbie has always great things to say about raising musical children and I think you'll find it very helpful and inspiring to listen to.

This season, we're excited to team up a few different times to have a conversation together and to pass on to you - as family supporting young music students or teachers supporting young music students some ideas between the two of us.

We love working together and collaborating on ideas, and we think there's a lot of fun and helpful information we can share with you in this format.

So we're looking forward to hearing what you think and what you'd like to hear us talk about in the future. So Barbie, thank you for being here and thanks for joining me.

Barbie Wong: It's great to be here, Christine. I love working with you.

Christine Goodner:

Likewise, the feeling is mutual. Today, we thought we would start by talking about the topic of going back to school or getting back into the school routine, and I want to acknowledge that people listen to this podcast from all over the world and from schools that have all sorts of formats of the school year that might be year-round. So maybe you're listening even partway through the year, and it's not a new episode when this first came out. So we think they'll be helpful to you regardless, and we're going to share each three tips or three ideas that we like to share with our own students or with families we work with about what can help in the back-to-school year timeframe or setting our new habits. So even if

this is not back to school time for you, I think these ideas are a good way to think about resetting or forming new habits any time of the year. It's just coming to mind for me as the start of the school year topic where I am at. So we think they'll be helpful to you regardless, and we're going to share each of us three tips or three ideas that we like to share with our own students or with families we work with about what can help in the back to school year timeframe or setting our new habits.

And then we'll have some discussion as we go. So I'll start us off with the first one I had on my list, and one thing I like to ask families to do this time of year is to think about their instrument needs and their materials needs. And I think just because it can be really helpful to have a set point in time where we look and notice: does the piano need to be tuned or does my instrument need new strings or the bow to be repaired or the pads changed on the wind instrument. There's a lot of maintenance things that are going to vary from instrument to instrument, but I find if we don't have a date to talk about that, suddenly we realize it's been two years and we should have done this maintenance a year ago and just time gets away from us because life is so busy.,

So I like to have this as a checkpoint, and you could pick any time in your calendar, but I like this as a checkpoint of "is anything needed for my instrument maintenance is anything needed as far as books or materials?" And check in with your teacher, if your teacher doesn't bring it up with you and just ask them, is there anything we should be taking care of now? And then the last thing I'll say about that is if right now it feels like there's a lot of back-to-school expenses, then maybe we put a note in our calendar for January that we're going to think about investing in some of those things at that point. So at least to get it on our calendar for not doing it now, I think this is a good time of year to think about that.

Barbie Wong: I love those ideas, Christine, and it's nice. It's great to have that yearly check in.

I like to think about at this part of the school year, what the activities are for your children? So, beginning the school year, what are we doing big picture-wise with all of the activities? I mean, all of the activities. And I actually asked this of the families that study with me because I want to know, oh, is your child in maybe five different activities in addition to music lessons? And if so, what does that mean? What does that mean for a music practice? And it's not to denounce other activities, but it's to really get a realistic view of, oh, how much time does the child actually have for music practice? And also, is this the best investment of your resources talking to parents? Is this what you want to do with your child's time this school year? And let's discuss that before in the middle of the school year when it seems like your child is really struggling and you've invested all this money and time into music lessons and you feel like, oh no, it's been wasted. So beginning the school year, what are we doing big picture wise with all of the activities?

Christine Goodner:

Oh, I love that. That's really important. I think that sort of goes kind of segues to my second idea I thought of, which was just scheduling time for practice, which is very similar because sometimes we can (and I've raised two children, I know how busy things get). We can have our time for the week of our weekly lesson and then forget that there's no soccer coach; for example, scheduling the practices throughout the week that we have to do that with our children and for our children.

And suddenly we realize, oh, where is this actually going to fit into our day? The other days when we don't have the lesson, when will we practice and have we blocked off time? Because that's a necessity. It's very similar to what you're saying because it's very frustrating to not make progress and to feel like, oh, there's never time to practice. And I have looked at some people's schedules and sometimes there literally isn't time to practice unless something gives. And so it's smart to just take a realistic look at that and then we can problem solve from there, whatever that looks like.

Barbie Wong:

Well, Christine, I love that. That's wonderful because yeah, a lot of times because we're so busy, if we don't actually schedule the time, and if we don't, some of us actually need to set alarms, and I will do this on my phone and we can do this really nicely because on Monday practice could start at four, but then Tuesday it needs to start at seven or whatever it is, and you put all those alarms in and they go off. And then it's just a simple reminder. And so my suggestion actually is similar in that I believe it's really important to focus on the habit of practice. So if your child isn't already in the habit of daily practice or consistent practice, it's really important to just get to the instrument. So even if it's like, oh, your child is resisting for whatever reason, even five minutes, 10 minutes at the instrument, every day is so much better than doing a 45 minute chunk once a week. And if you can focus on that habit and develop the habit, eventually the child will actually stop resisting and it will become more fun because your child will gain momentum, they will progress, and they'll actually feel really good about the progress that they're making.

Christine Goodner:

Oh yeah, a hundred percent. I couldn't agree with that more. I've heard even just writers talking about writer's block, which is a big issue for writers that they are always talking about, and how that the more you just have yourself sit down on a certain routine and start writing, then the more you're going to quickly move through that resistance part of getting started into deep work that happens. It's just a human thing that happens. So yeah. Yeah, I think that's so important to talk about. But just even a little bit (of practice) then you're scheduling and you're practicing that habit of practice, even if it's not a full practice time. So sometimes students are so exhausted at the beginning of the school year. That could be a helpful way to remember doing just something that is so useful. (Baribe: Oh yeah)

I guess there's so many. . . We agreed we would come up with three things to think about at the start of the year, and we could just probably come up with a 100 (laughs)

So the third one though that I wanted to talk about today was having an emergency practice plan because I think there are days when you have your list from your teacher and you can get through all the assignments, and then there are days where you're feeling very frazzled or nobody's in the mood, somebody's tired, there's extra activities.

And I think if you have a list of what could we do on the days when it's hard to get in practice and you have that somewhere you can refer to. I was talking to somebody about this recently, just that those days are not days we feel creative about. Let's come up with a creative way to get a short practice.

And usually we're just thinking like, "oh, maybe it's not worth it to do anything". So I think - if you think of what could we do as a bare minimum or as a fun thing to do when there's not much time - I just love

having that emergency plan somewhere in your practice binder, in your phone, in your device that you can pull up and not have to make any decisions. Just like, let's pick one of these things and let's, like you're saying, do something so we don't skip a day of practice that really we could at least practice that habit, if not, get some things done.

Barbie Wong:

I love that Christine, and I love the idea that it's called the emergency practice session. We all have that. I mean, it happens to so many of us when it's like, oh, it's eight whatever time, half an hour before bedtime, and you realize everyone's exhausted and your child has in practice and you're like, "oh, do I push it? Do I not push it?"

And it's nice and it actually makes me realize I've had an emergency practice plan and what my plan usually is with my kids, I just say, Hey, just play three songs and just play however you like to play them and just get to the instrument. And usually that works really well and they just play the three songs and then they're done.

Christine Goodner:

Wow. That's a beautiful example of exactly what I'm talking about. It doesn't have to be complicated, it's just something you can go to that you don't have to think of in the moment. So yeah, I think this is a good time of year to maybe think about that and tuck it away as needed.

Barbie Wong:

I love it. And that's actually similar to then my third idea in terms of how to really strengthen musical development for the year.

And that is to always have two things in the practice session. I always think about practice as sort of on a spectrum. So on the one end of the spectrum is your practice. You're doing things that are hard learning, new skills and repetition.

On the other end of the spectrum is playing where you've mastered something. And so it feels easy and it just flows. So practice for the most part is hard and playing is easy. And I think it's so important to have both parts of that in your practice. And one way to structure it, as I suggest, is to start with the play. Have the child play whatever they want. And sometimes I'll even suggest if there's a contentious parent-child relationship, I'll just suggest have an object that the child can put on the music stand or on the piano that says, this is the part I'm just playing. And then this is when the parent cannot say anything negative, that child just gets to play whatever they want.

And then when they're ready for the more focused practice, then they can take that object off. And it could be anything like a little eraser, small, little stuffed animal, but having both of those basically strengthens practice because then the child is actually doing something pleasurable. We want children to practice enjoyment of playing. And so having both of those is going to make that happen.

Christine Goodner:

Oh, that's a really great tip. I like that a lot. I think if it's all hard work and never fun, of course that's not going to develop motivation to want to do it the next day. And if it's all fun and never work, you're having lots of fun, but maybe we're not gaining the skills on the instrument that we're trying to work towards. So that balance, that sounds like a great thing to think about.

Barbie Wong: Oh yeah, definitely.

Christine Goodner:

Well, we encourage you to think about what else you would put on your list. Again, we could just list 10 things, if not a hundred, between the two of us, about thinking back to school. But also this gives you a short, manageable list to maybe think about in your own practice life and would love to hear your feedback of what you would add to the list.

And Barbie and I also want to share that we are working together on a community, talking about subjects like this supporting musical development and students supporting families working with young musicians. And we would love to invite you to check into that and be a part of that. Then it will exist on circle outside of the social media realm. We have a nice small group there, and we have a wait list that we'll put in the show notes if you're interested in that. We invite you to check that out and join us and continuing this conversation. So Barbara, thanks for being here and speaking with me today and I look forward to doing this again.

Barbie Wong: Yeah, me too. Thank you so much for having me. It's good to talk to you.

Christine Goodner:

Before we go today I wanted to give a quick recap of the tips from this episode:

Barbie's three back to school tips or ideas included:

Mapping out all of your child's activities in order to get a true picture of how much time they have to devote to music practice

Making a habit of music practice

Finding the balance between two important parts of practice - the hard work, and playing without critical feedback coming their way

My three tips were:

Checking in with your teacher about materials or any instrument maintenance that may be needed this year - if now is not a good time financially or logistically put it on your calendar for a specific date in the future

Scheduling time in your schedule to practice, not just for your lesson

and finally to have an emergency practice plan - somewhere you can pull it up and look at it and not have to be creative or make any decisions when anyone is having "one of those days"

Thank you to all of you who have been sharing the podcast and tagging me - you have no idea how much that helps! Telling someone in person is amazing too - this podcast is meant to be a resource and the more people that hear it and are helped by it the better - thanks for helping make that happen!

Next week I'll be back with another great interview - I'll looking forward to talking to all of you in the Time to Practice community then.

For now - have a great week and happy practicing!

*Transcript created by Rev.com