



## Episode 70: Two Questions I'm Most Often Asked About Music Practice

Welcome to episode 70. I am just getting back after being a bit sick, so hopefully my voice sounds different. That's what's going on, but it's going to hold out just fine for this episode. I just want to start by saying there's a lot of stressful things going on in the world, and if I'm honest, I had to dig pretty deep to prepare to record today and to feel like what I have to say about music practice is what's really important right now.

And so I'm here because I really had to remind myself that in my most stressful times of life, this sure isn't the first for me or for you likely and unfortunately probably isn't the last. But I have always found solace and comfort in music and listening to certain kinds of music on repeat, on making music with others, my own practice times where I put thoughts of everything else aside and really just immerse myself in the music that I'm making and certainly in pouring my energy into supporting the students that I work with, it gives us something beautiful and productive to work on and to add to our children's lives. And so here I am, and here we are at this podcast. We always talk about learning music, supporting students and teachers and families supporting young musicians, and making sure that we think about how do we help make this work for us?

How do we see ourselves represented in the world, and how do we see perspectives different from ourselves represented so that we can learn from each other's experiences and celebrate each person in this wonderful world of music that we get to experience. We are all the richer from having each other's perspectives and for supporting the gift that is music in our lives and in young people's lives.

So when I was thinking about what I wanted to share with you, I thought about the fact that I gave six different talks last month to different groups, mostly groups of parents and caregivers and their teachers who had organized the talks. And I wanted to share some common themes I saw running through all the various talks I gave, especially questions that either were submitted in advance, if that's the format of the talk I was giving, or that people asked when we had a q and a at the end of my sessions.

And really those themes were first, how can I help my child learn how to practice and also how can I help my child enjoy their practice more? In fact, one person just put it like, how do I make my child feel like music practice is less of a chore? So I wanted to share a few ideas with you about this because I think this is really what we're doing when we're thinking about supporting students in practice and how do we get specific about these.

So the first thing I want to say is that there are many great resources out there for strategies, practical strategies for practice, and how to do the actual work of music practice. The fact that you're listening to this podcast is a great start and some of our past guests have really rich resources for you.

I want to point out a couple people I would look for, and I also want to say it really depends on the age and experience level of your child, which resource might be the best fit for you. But there's a lot out there. So I think sometimes knowing where to start can be really helpful. Dr. Molly Gabriel, she's been on the podcast twice and has a new book out on the neuroscience of practice. I would recommend her to anyone who's got high schooler or older middle schooler who are practicing an advanced way looking for more resources.

Her book is excellent and her resources are excellent. She has a YouTube channel and her website has a lot of great resources for you as well. So I will link to all of her resources in the show notes of this podcast. I always publish a blog post on my website that goes along with each podcast episode, and you will find her information there linked to this podcast episode.

And then also Susanna Klein. I know she's working on writing a book. She also has great resources both in the podcast interview that we did together, but also on her YouTube channel, on her social media channel, her website. So I will link to her resources as well.

And then a book that I recently read and discussed with members of the musical Nest community that I run with Barbie Wong that I would recommend for younger students and for families. Just starting off with practice, I always recommend my own resources. You hear me talk about that a lot here. But another resource I would recommend is Practice Pie. The subtitle for this book is The Step-by-Step Guide to Helping Your Child Enjoy Their Music Practice by Nicola Campton and C-A-N-T-A-N. If you're looking for that resource, this is a great, great resource that has some little quote recipes in the back about particular types of music practice.

And it's a really quick read in the best kind of way. It's like lots of packed in there in a really digestible format I think can be really encouraging to families, and I think easy to get through on your limited time, you may have to sit with a book or listen to a book, so I can't recommend that enough. And of course, what your individual child needs to practice, their individual assignments from their teacher is going to really vary. And so what I always say as a teacher is that I really want to know if somebody needs more information to figure out how do I take the task you're assigning us to do at home and actually make them happen.

In the practice space, sometimes it's really easy to just repeat what you saw in the lesson or your child remembers what if they're practicing independently, what to do in the lesson and make that happen. But sometimes the way practice needs to happen at home is going to look a little different than the flow of the lesson. And then that's something I would always want to talk to my students and families about

and provide them more support. So I'm going to encourage you to reach out to your teacher and ask for some more information. Or if you're in the lesson with your child and you're not sure how you're going to make a particular assignment happen at home, ask if some more time could be spent on that. I would always welcome that conversation so that I know what I'm assigning can be done successfully at home.

So there's just so many individual answers that can come with this kind of a question, but that's where I would get started. And then there's the other side of this conversation, which is, how do I help my child enjoy practice more? And what I often tell people is there are some students who just naturally enjoy the process of practice from a very young age when they first get started. In my experience for 20 plus years of teaching, that's definitely more of an exception than a rule. It does happen. I'm very happy for anyone who feels like their child just loves to practice right away and isn't sure what the problem is when they hear us talking about this. But for other students, practice is going to feel a bit like a chore at first or hard work or potentially frustrating until they get some more skills established until they get a bit older.

Maybe there's some brain development that needs to happen or just experience working through practice before they kind of get the hang of it and enjoy it more. They might need to understand how to practice more effectively. Some of those strategies and resources from earlier could help. And for some of them it's when they're able to join an ensemble and they have a social outlet to practice in or to practice for. Then sometimes that's the spark that helps people enjoy their individual practice more. I guess what I like to say is that it's okay.

Our practice feels like a bit of a chore sometimes because it is hard work. And once we feel like the fact that our child feels like this is not abnormal or doesn't mean something about if they should or shouldn't be playing their instrument, then I think the next step is to start thinking about how to help them enjoy it more and how to make them dislike it less at the very least, and maybe make it a more neutral activity.

So here's where I would recommend injecting some fun, some play some games into practice, especially for young students, that can be really important. But for some of us our whole life, we're going to need to think about how do we make it more fun for ourselves when it's feeling like a bit of a chore on a given day.

And like Drake shared with us on their episode of the podcast, it could be as simple as making it clear when practice will be over so that the student knows, okay, I need to get these things done. And then there's an end to this practice. And that alone can make it feel more enjoyable. So it could be making repetitions that a student needs to complete more fun, more visible, making sure that they don't feel like they're never ending to our child. It could be making sure our child has something to play in each practice session that they really enjoy, even if we are going to go digging a bit to find something for them or ask their teacher or they figure out a piece by ear or something like this.

Your practice is a discipline and learning instrumental skills can take a lot of hard work, but often what people love about music is the joy or satisfaction they get from making it. They love how the music makes them feel or the sense of accomplishment they get from playing something with ease that used to be hard or challenging. And they might love sharing music with other people, and that's what makes them love being a part of music themselves. So thinking about how we can make music more about that for our child, one of those things, and balancing out the hard work or the this is frustrating aspect of practice can be really helpful. So please know if you're a family practicing with a young child, it's okay that some of practice feels like hard work or a chore, and our child's really going to learn how to work

through frustration and practice in small, healthy doses with some support is the way that that's going to work out well for them overall.

And this is why I like families to be involved and practice with young children is so they can help them kind of coach that through. Many people will tell me they hope their child learns how to work hard or how to be perseverant or develop grit through their music lessons. And I think this is how this happens. We acknowledge that yes, it's hard, it's frustrating sometimes. We wish it were easier. We encourage if we're the young musician, we get encouraged. We might take deep breaths and pause when needed and step away and come back when we're feeling more calm or regulated. We don't give up. We get help from our teacher, maybe our parent or caregiver who's practicing with us. We try again and again over and over, and hopefully we start to see progress, to see it was worth it that our skills improved and things got easier.

We celebrate and enjoy the end result of all that hard work. And I think it's that cycle of hard work, pushing through, seeing progress and celebrating that is the very thing that sparks motivation and builds that perseverance that a lot of people gain through their study of music. And eventually, we can trust the fact that with time and effort and potentially help from the right person, that we can break anything down and work on it and make it better and we don't need to give up. And that my friend, is not a quick and easy process. And I think it's through that, that so much character is built through the study of music. I heard an interview recently with parenting expert Dr. Becky Kennedy, and she was asked if she had any message that she would want to share with the world that she would put on a billboard, what would it be?

And one quote that she wrote that's really struck me, and I wrote it down was quote, this feels hard because it is hard, not because you're doing something wrong. And I thought immediately of how true that was. When I am talking with families who are supporting their young musician, it is hard to help our child learn to cope with frustration, to learn to take something that feels like a big sticky problem of a new piece or a technical skill we haven't learned yet, and break it down into small chunks and help them work through their frustration and all the perseverance involved. So as you go into practice this coming week, I encourage you to have conversations with your teacher if that's what you need to look for some new resources to give you ideas about practice strategies. Maybe go back and listen to some of the past episodes of this podcast, nearly every episode here, that's something we're talking about. And if you're worried that practice feels like a bit of a chore to your child right now, it's okay to acknowledge that it is hard work. Maybe today it does feel like a chore. Something to ponder is how do we make that more tolerable, less frustrating, and more enjoyable to do that work because the end result is so, so worth it. Happy practicing this week. Time to Practice community. Take good care.

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