

Resistance

SOME IDEAS FOR GETTING THE JOB DONE IN SPITE OF IT

Cover the basics.

Make sure the technique works well enough so the child can feel successful in the short and long term. Attend group classes and concerts. Listen to the Suzuki tapes. Listen to lots of other music as well. Take careful notes at lessons.

Give the child lots of choices.

A child must be given *genuine* choices, or it doesn't work. Craft your questions in such a way that the child can have a real choice. (e.g. If you know a child needs to practice "Allegro," do NOT ask "Do you want to practice 'Allegro'?"—**INSTEAD**—"Do you want to practice 'Allegro' before 'Song of the Wind,' after we practice 'Song of the Wind,' or after we practice 'Perpetual Motion'?") When you give children choices and are flexible at every opportunity you possibly can be, it makes it easier not to give choices when you can't (there may be times when it is crucial to play "Allegro" *after* "Song of the Wind").

Request what's working well.

Ask children to do what they're already doing well. This is difficult to resist. Catching kids goofing up is a no-brainer.

Consider ignoring it.

Remember that ignoring some behaviors may be a wise move.

Don't just do something, stand there.

Let the child struggle. Praise the process later. (Parents: This move is not just to show the teacher you know how to praise, but to give genuine praise. Kids can smell the difference miles away.)

Sing!

SING! Make sure you're both thinking of the same song.

Be honest about cooperation.

"Co-operate" doesn't mean "Do what your parent or the teacher says," it means "We work together." Ask the child to report on the work you're doing, and you report on the work the child is doing.

Ask; don't tell.

Ask the child to report whether the desired outcome happened ("Play 'Long, Long Ago,' and then I'm going to ask you if the bow colored one spot on the string.") If the child's report does not accurately reflect what happened, before labelling the child a "liar", consider the following possibilities:

1. The child may not have understood the instructions
(*I always consider this a graceful and polite place to start*)

...OR...

2. The child may need to save face
(*What is the child risking if he admits he did it incorrectly?*)

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Ask yourself "How does the child benefit from this behavior?"

Know that the child is working to get something, not simply trying to make the parent work harder. If he were, what would be in it for him? Remember that the child may not consciously know what he hopes to get, in which case he won't be able to tell you what he wants directly (see "...resistance as a gift").

Play games.

Play games the child can and wants to win: Cards, Pennies, Peel-off Stickers

Use the resistance.

Ask for it. ("Push your head into my hand.")

Allow the child to pick the practice time.

Play is the child's work, and getting interrupted can be a big irritation. If the child still fusses, develop a full picture for the child of the behavior you want. Instead of saying "Don't fuss" you say "Quietly stand in rest position and get ready for a bow when the timer goes off" (or whatever "NOT fussing" means to you). If child fails to produce the desired behavior when it's time to practice, then the parent gets to choose the practice time the next day.

Discuss goals.

Talk to the child to see if you both want the same thing. (e.g. "You know, I would like nothing better than to have you be able to do it by yourself. That's why I'm doing it with you now.")

Discard words like "concentrate" and "focus."

I usually consider these words to be useless with anyone under the age of...well, with anyone of any age. Instead, give the child something to focus on ("Stay in rest position while I count to five"—or—"Listen for evenness in the sixteenth notes in the last movement").

Ask yourself questions.

"When a child resists me, I feel _____. "
"A perfect child would always _____ and never _____." "
"A person who wanted to make me resistant could _____."

Think of resistance as a gift.

Consider that resistance might be the child's way of helping you. Resistance may be the child's way of cooperating by showing the adult what doesn't work. In this sense, it may be a gift. (It may be a gift *and* irritating!)

Remember that slow practice is difficult.

This does not mean that a child can avoid doing it. What it *does* mean is that it's o.k. for a child to be frustrated and to loathe doing it—while at the same time the child does the slow, careful practice. You can't control feelings.

Follow through with consequences, both negative and positive.

If you tell a child you will take her to the zoo on Saturday if she practices every day this week, be sure to take her to the zoo if she holds up her end of the bargain. If she doesn't hold up her end of the bargain, don't take her to the zoo. A promise is a promise, and kids thrive on stability and dependability. A child whose parents don't follow through on consequences (including negative ones) is likely to become angry and/or scared. (See Clarke, Jean: *Growing Up Again*)

Know that children can't understand our frustrations.

It's more likely that we can understand theirs. We can go down to their level, but they can't come up to ours.