

Surviving Those Practice Slumps!

By Ann Montzka Smelser with many thanks to all my facebook friends (Suzuki Parents and Students and Teachers) and their creative solutions!

Who has them? At some point EVERYONE experiences a slump in motivation. It is typical and normal to have a slump, do not panic.

Why are we in this slump? Maybe the "newness" has worn off and now it just seems like "work." Maybe you have been at this for many years and other interests are vying for you or your child's time. Maybe the normal changes of adolescence dull the interest due to peers and quest for independence. Maybe you just do not feel like you are "getting anywhere."

What can be done? Talk about it as a normal part of life. See ideas below.

Where can we turn? Parents need each other (BOOK CLUBS), Teachers need each other (CONFERENCES) and so do students (GROUP LESSONS and WORKSHOPS/INSTITUTES)!!! We also need to work as a triangle to help climb out.

When is it time to confront our teacher about this problem? Weekly "smile-o-meter" can help. Should we ever discuss the(gasp)...Q word?!

How can I prevent this in the future? Some ideas may help prevent slumps, but climbing out of a slump can actually be very empowering and should be remembered for the future as a sign of fortitude and diligence.

The Early Years:

This stage is totally up to the parent to make it happen. The daily practice, the listening, the creativity and above all the FAITH and ENTHUSIASM is up to Mom and Dad. The good news is most children want to please parents at this stage (deep down) and they WANT to be with you.

Begin with the basics. "Don't forget the chocolate in your chocolate cake".

Once begun is half done. Begin the practice with a treasure hunt or other special game. Make it EASY to practice together by *having the materials and instrument easy to access (VIOLIN HOOK), have clear goals for each practice from lesson notes. Schedule a regular and daily practice and listening.*

Mix it up! Different practice location, child selects practice order or DO and DON'T list, performance in place of practice, Homemade practice board games, board games, spinners and dice can all add spice and an element of surprise. Just changing the location of the practice can be powerful!

Marked progress aids motivation, see the repetitions, count the practice days on the calendar, put pennies in a jar, burn a practice candle and always celebrate each small accomplishment!

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The Middle Years:

It is all about building ownership and gradually handing over more practice responsibility and accountability. This starts from the first lessons as we expect the child to carry their own case and get their violin ready (tuning later Book 1). Answering questions about assignments and formulating their own practice solutions is imperative to ownership. They will become their own teacher each time they are practicing on their own in later years.

Ask rather than tell (Count to 10 extra seconds so there is thinking time). Create a safe environment of exploration and discovery.

Complaint Department is open for 3 minutes. Sometimes knowing it is normal to have frustrations and vent a bit before getting down to work makes all the difference.

Work with your child's practice style (even if it is opposite your own):

For the "Focus-Challenged," - drive by practices, For the Perfectionist - the mistake game, The Boss - they teach you or plan the practice order, The High Energy student - practice on a balance board, mini trampoline or with a challenging move with each repetition. The Performer - Skype a concert to Aunt Betty!

Try a Practice Partner switch like a different practice parent or older teen.

The Later Years:

At puberty, the human body goes through the terrible 2's all over again. The young teenager's brain shuts off for a while and the body and its hormones go through an incredible growth spurt. This explains the "always tired", "spaciness", self-consciousness, and puzzling behavior of a once "normal" child. Sudden changes can differ from wanting to quit to wanting to tackle a major concerto.

Sometimes you just need to coast, tread water, and know they are doing the best they can for now. Let the student feel the accountability to the teacher at this stage but keep the lines of communication open.

Emerging identity can be found through different pieces and musical styles. Learn theory through composition, and improvise to popular music!

Peers become an even larger influence. Teen only group lessons are identity builders. This is a GREAT time for advanced Suzuki Chamber music camps. Youth Orchestra, school orchestra or band, choir can have a positive impact.

Attending performances of great artists and advanced teens is really powerful at every stage. Go watch a rockstar perform, like Gabe!

Focus on the BIG PICTURE

"The only concern for parents should be to bring up their children as noble human beings, That is sufficient"

Shinichi Suzuki