



4 Things Every Parent Should Know Before Starting Music Lessons

1. How Young is Too Young?

Adults can start an instrument at any time. Their success is based on how willing they are to commit themselves to practicing. In fact, the Bergen Academy teaches many beginners in their 60's!

For children, starting at the right age is the key element to the success of their music lessons. Some people will tell you "the sooner the better" but this attitude can actually backfire and have a negative impact. If a child is put into lessons too soon, they will feel overwhelmed and frustrated and want to stop lessons. The last thing you want to do is turn a child off music just because they had one unpleasant experience --- something which could have been prevented! Sometimes if the child waits a year until the proper age to start lessons, their progress can be much faster. Children who are older than the suggested earliest starting age usually do very well. The following are guidelines we have found to be successful in determining how young a child can start taking music lessons.

4 years old or younger

If a pre-schooler has a keen desire and wants to start music lessons, a group preschool music class will give them a good foundation in music basics and will be helpful in future private lessons. At this age, private lessons generally do not work, as the child has not yet experienced the formal learning environment of kindergarten or primary school and learns more effectively through a "game-oriented" preschool environment.

Piano

At the Bergen Academy of Music, 5 years old (with occasional exceptions) is the youngest age that we start children in private piano lessons. At this age they have begun to develop a longer attention span and can retain material with ease. Students 5+ up also possess the hand size and strength required for proper use of the keyboard.

Guitar - Acoustic, Electric and Bass

7 years old is the earliest we recommend children for guitar lessons. Guitar playing requires a fair amount of pressure on the fingertips in order to properly press the strings. Children under 7 generally have small hands and may find playing uncomfortable. Bass guitar students generally are 10 years old and older.

Voice Lessons

10 years old is recommended as the youngest age for private vocal lessons. Due to the physical nature of voice lessons (proper breathing techniques, development of vocal chords and lung capacity), the younger body is generally not yet ready for the rigors of vocal technique. However, for children younger than 10, we have a young beginner's program in which our experienced teachers will teach students how to use their voices properly, in a fun, relaxed environment.

Saxophone, Flute and Clarinet

Due to lung capacity (and in the case of the saxophone, the size of the instrument), we recommend that most woodwind beginners are 9 years or older.

Violin

In general, we accept violin students from the age of 5. Some children are able to start earlier and we have had success with students that are younger than 5. It is essential that you bring your child in to meet with one of our violin teachers in person to determine their individual readiness.

Cello

We accept cello students from the age of 7. Some children are able to start earlier and we have had success with students that are younger than 7. It is essential that you bring your child in to meet with one of our violin teachers in person to determine their individual readiness.

2. Should I choose private lessons or group classes for my child?

Group classes work well for preschool music programs and theory lessons. However, when actually learning how to play an instrument, private lessons are far superior for both children and adult students. Learning a specific instrument can be surprisingly challenging, especially for children. It is essential that every student is introduced to their instrument properly at the beginning and taught carefully thereafter. In private lessons, it is hard to miss anything and each student is able to learn at their own pace. This private, "one-on-one" setting also allows teachers to instruct each student according to their unique traits and individual goals. This means the teacher does not have to teach a class at a "middle of the road" level, but has the time and focus to work on an individual student's strengths and weaknesses. For each private lesson period, the student is the primary focus of the teacher. The teachers also enjoy this as they do not have to divide their attention and energy between 5-10 students at a time and can help the student be the best they can be.

3. In-home lessons or take lessons at a music school?

It can be a tough choice for some students when it comes to deciding where to take music lessons. The biggest advantage of taking lessons at home (either your own or the teacher's) is convenience. In most cases there is little or no travel time needed for music lessons. Trustworthiness can also be a factor since many teachers who teach at homes have a good reputation in the area. The downside of in-home lessons is the lack of structure and a good learning environment. Consistency of lessons can be an issue and usually the learning environment is far from ideal, such as distractions from the surroundings, ringing phones, siblings, pets, etc.

We believe that learning music is not just a matter of having a qualified teacher, but also having an environment that is focused on music education. In a professional school setting, lessons are given in a learning environment and students can not be distracted by other things. With only ½ to one hour of lesson time per week, a professional school environment can produce better results since the only focus at that time is learning music. Students in a school environment are also motivated by hearing peers at different levels and by being exposed to a variety of musical instruments. Also, keep in mind that in a well-run music school, teachers are chosen very carefully and their progress monitored regularly to ensure each student receives the best quality teaching. In our music school, the lessons are not just a hobby or side-line for our faculty, but rather represent a responsibility that is taken very seriously by the entire staff.

4. How to choose the right teacher for my child?

Group classes work well for preschool music. Once the specific instrument and place to take lessons have been decided, the last and most important step is the choice of the right teacher. Besides asking about a teacher's credentials and professional experience, personality is extremely important. In general, we have found that teachers that are fun, encouraging and upbeat work well with children. We have also found that experienced, younger teachers work extremely well with children. Not only are they easier to get along with for children, younger teachers are usually still practicing and performing actively. This sends a positive vibe to students.