

Dear Parent,

You have decided to help your child study the art of piano playing through the Suzuki method – or, more precisely, you have taken the decision to allow the Suzuki method to become part of your family life. Congratulations!

The Suzuki method can become one of the most rewarding and positive experiences you will share with your child. It can be a factor in strengthening the parent-child bond and can create a new interest to be shared by the entire family.

You have taken on the responsibility to help and encourage your child to learn. In the **Pupil – Parent – Teacher** triangle you are just as important as your child. In this respect there are some points which are very important to consider. You may not have come across these if you yourself were taught in a more traditional way. With other children you know these points may not be necessarily part of their instrument learning situations. These points are however at the very core of Suzuki learning and I would urge you to read and re-read them carefully and also to take these points as a base for discussions during parent evenings.

1. Play the Suzuki recordings of all Book 1 pieces at least twice daily. Before long you will notice your child humming the melodies. Young children enjoy repetition and will not tire of the music. The same cannot necessarily be said of their parents who may after some months become bored and irritated from hearing the same music over and over again. Just remind yourself that it is in your child's interest that you are listening to this recording, whether together (i.e. at breakfast time) or whether he hears it by himself, i.e. in his room. This needs to be a commitment which everyone in the family understands. Remember, each time your child hears the recording it will make the playing of a particular piece she is learning easier. She will also be thoroughly familiar with each new piece before actually learning to play it.

2. Think about how you yourself enjoy listening to good music in your home. Your child will quite naturally be part of this with you and in this way you create a learning environment which will encourage and nurture him. "Creating an environment" for music learning is something which the Suzuki method stresses and which distinguishes it from other methods, where the direct contact time with the instrument is largely what counts.

Dr. Suzuki recommends familiarising infants from birth with one specific piece and then gradually enlarging his music "recognition" repertoire.

The pieces in Book 1 are very much based on the classical repertoire. You may have some classical music in your home collection which you may want to share with him. On the whole classical music, such as you hear often in Classic FM or Radio 3, or jazz or folk or similar are preferable to large quantities of 'pop' music.

There are also many opportunities for childrens' concerts in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire or further afield. Small children may not be able to sit through an entire concert, especially when it is primarily aimed at adults, but in that case half a concert is fine too. Often tickets for children are free or reduced.

3. Before you start lessons you will observe other children's lessons. This will increase your child's desire to want to learn too. It will also show the studio environment and will help him to feel less shy and (hopefully!) more eager to start himself. He can see and learn another child being attentive and find out about such attitudes as concentration, listening, focussing...

When she is ready to start she will learn to bow – this will be the official opening! During the first lessons YOU may well spend half the allocated time at the piano! Many things need showing and trying and you are after all the home teacher!

4. Try and arrange your schedule so you can have a good time to practise together each day. Try and establish a routine and make practise a priority at that time, with nothing, especially not the phone, being allowed to interrupt it! The time you spend together should be a special time which ideally both you and your child will look forward to as you have each other's undivided attention then. Often the term "practise" has been associated with ideas of 'slog', hard work and no fun, missing out on other, rather more pleasant activities. Now the first important goal for the new parent is to find out ways in which practise can become a pleasurable activity. Plenty of smiles, hugs and praise can certainly contribute. This in itself is a much more important learning step than learning the many new pieces in Book 1!

The first practises will be very short, usually only around 5 minutes, depending on the age of the child. It may be possible to fit other, bite-sized practises into the day, especially if the child does not yet go to school. In time practise sessions will increase in length, according to his ability.

What exactly you will practise will be determined by what happened in the lesson and what task the teacher has given you for that week. Your aim is to practise every day of the week, or, as Dr Suzuki put it, 'practise only on days you eat!'

5. During the lesson you will have a notebook and pen but will not be expected to actively take part. The lesson is the time when pupil and teacher focus on each other. It will be too much for the pupil to be 'caught' between 2 adults. Any questions can be noted in the book and clarified at the end of the lesson. Some parents even make tape or video recordings of lessons. During the week I am always happy to be contacted with queries of any kind so that the lesson time has as little "chat" as possible and the child always feels the centre of attention.

On the whole you can relax, take notes and enjoy the lesson; it's then over to you for the rest of the week!

Beate Toyka, revised July 28. 2011

READING LIST

It is necessary to read about Dr. Suzuki's philosophy of learning before starting lessons so that you can understand and appreciate the differences with traditional methods.

tick when read

"Nurtured By Love" by Shinichi Suzuki

"Ability Training from Age Zero" by Shinichi Suzuki

"Starting Suzuki Piano" by Doris Koppelman

" My thoughts on Suzuki piano" by Haruko Kataoka

YOUR PIANO

Your piano needs to be the best quality you can afford in order to inspire your child to learn about making a beautiful sound. A digital piano is not acceptable. The piano needs to be tuned regularly.

You will need a **piano stool** which will rise to the height suitable for your child. The best are adjustable stools with scrolls on either side. Pillows are too soft to give firm enough support. She will also need a **foot stool** to stop the feet from dangling. A stack of yellow pages covered tightly with material can fulfill this purpose. I can advise on where and how to obtain these important pieces of equipment. Good posture is the vital prerequisite for good playing so please don't postpone these arrangements.

RECORDINGS

You will need at least one recording of Suzuki Piano Books 1, and soon also 2, on tape or CD. I recommend those recordings made by Haruko Kataoka, pianist and pioneer of the Suzuki piano method. Her recordings feature every piece 4 times and have clarity, beauty of tone and mostly the right speed. This recording needs to be played several times a day. Some families play it in the car, but this is not enough. If you compare learning a musical instrument with learning a language you will agree it is very important to be surrounded with these new sounds as much as possible.

PIANO BOOK ONE

This will need to be bought when lessons begin. Both books and CD can be bought from:

British Suzuki Institute
Unit 1.01, The Lightbox
111 Power Road
Chiswick
London W4 5PY
Tel: 020 3176 4170
Music Shop: 0203176 4172

You are expected to join the BSI as a member. This entitles you to reduced prices on the above publications, a bi-monthly newsletter and supports the work of the BSI both in UK and worldwide.

STUDIO POLICY

Fees:

£30 per hour, and parts thereof (i.e. £15 for 30 mins.) whether used by child or parent. I will invoice you towards the end of a half-term and would be expected to be paid by the last lesson of half term. Term times are usually those dictated by state rather than private schools.

Missed lessons:

Missed lessons during term time are charged for unless enough notice has been given to realistically rearrange them. Missed lessons due to sickness will if at all possible be rearranged in the same week or during the following half-term. They will NOT be carried over into the next half-term. Lessons missed by the teacher will be made up during the term or credited to the following term.

Contract:

A contract (as drawn by EPTA, the European Piano Teachers Association, of which I am a member) will need to be signed by teacher and parent. It will commit us to give at least 6 weeks notice if either part wants to stop lessons.

Group lessons:

Groups take place between 2 and 4 times per half term. They are a fun and motivating. They include rhythm, aural and listening games. Usually the last group of the term is the end of term concert and will not be charged. Parents kindly bring a plate of finger foods for a little party afterwards. Charge will apply.

Lesson "Etiquette":

Sometimes lessons can run a bit longer than the exact scheduled time. This will be because an important point needs to be made to the student. It is helpful if you can accept slight differences in the knowledge that some time it will be your turn too! Remember that you can learn as much from observing another child's lesson as from your own lesson!

Please come into the studio quietly when another lesson is in progress. The teacher will notice you entering the room but will not be able to acknowledge you with a greeting at that moment as she will be focusing on the pupil who is currently being taught.

Please help your child to go to the toilet and wash his hands before the lesson!