

From The Companion Series, Volume 1

By Leslie Faye Johnson

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Introduction

For many people, the idea of teaching a young child to play a string¹ instrument such as the violin is met with either resistance or dread. Learning to play the violin isn't terribly difficult. Nor, does the beginning violinist sound as strident as one might imagine. The mental skills needed to learn violin are the same as those used for learning to read and do math. The physical aspect of playing the violin does require good fine-motor skills, but these skills improve, are enhanced and require daily practice. In addition to better academic performance in school, children gain increased self-confidence and poise. And of course, violin lessons expose the student (and practice partners) to the amazing world of classical music.

¹ For the purposes of this book, a string instrument refers to a violin, viola, cello or double bass.

Children are able to begin violin at age 3, 4 or 5 because violins are available in such a wide range of sizes. Renting from the nearest violin shop is one option, as a violin shop should have experience in sizing a violin for your child.

Buying online is another option, but make sure you know the return policy, in the event the violin you receive is the wrong size.

Do your best to make and maintain your commitment to music lessons. Providing your child with the financial support needed for lessons is not enough—your presence and moral support at lessons and practices are equally important. There are only two additional ingredients for success: a knowledgeable teacher and a daily practice plan.

In some towns, there truly is only one teacher available. But when there is a choice, interview the teachers to compare musical education backgrounds, experience, teaching style and methodology. If possible, bring your child to a live interview,

so you can determine how well everyone will communicate and get along.

A practice partner, usually a parent, is needed at all music lessons and all home practice sessions. Bring the *Companion* book to the lesson along with the music book and instrument. Take notes on the lesson if needed, in the margins or in the space provided in each chapter. Give the lesson time 100% of your attention.

Difficulties only arise when a daily practice plan is not followed. If possible, practice at around the same time every day. The time spent in practice should not be an issue at this point, as repetitions are built into the daily practice plans. At this beginning stage, most practice sessions will last 15-30 minutes. And your child will truly appreciate and benefit from your undivided attention during these practices—practicing is a great way to spend quality time with your child! And notice

the word daily is underscored: I cannot emphasize too highly how important daily practice is.