



Teaching the Violin and Viola: Creating a Healthy Foundation

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The Triangle

THE TRIANGLE: WHAT IS IT?

The triangle is a system that provides the most ideal situation for a child to succeed and maximizes potential in his or her development as a musician. The three parts of the triangle represent the interwoven parent-student-teacher relationships.

The parent-student relationship is first and foremost about communication at home. The parent reinforces what the teacher has taught at the lesson and is responsible for creating a positive learning environment for the student at home.

The teacher-student relationship involves the teacher imparting knowledge to the student in a supportive environment and being aware of each student's unique learning style needs.

The parent-teacher relationship allows the student to work well at home and in the studio, because both leadership roles are in agreement about lesson-related issues. This united front gives the child clear guidance and supports superior performance.

THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

PARENT to TEACHER:

The parent is responsible for communicating with the teacher in order to understand the expectations for the student at home and to inform the teacher about what happens during at-home practice. This parental insight gives the teacher a better understanding of the student's learning style and how much the student can handle during lessons.

The parent is responsible for communicating the teacher's expectations to the student at home and positively reinforcing learned concepts. When the student is young, the parent should ensure consistent, timely lesson attendance and write lesson notes for follow-through at home. The parent should guide the student to independent time management in daily practice by creating consistent, structured practice times and working through material alongside the student. Each student has a different pace of learning new information; therefore, the parent should be aware of the student's frustrations and struggles at home and share that information with the teacher. Healthy parental involvement, while different for each child, is essential for positive student growth.

PARENT to STUDENT:

This portion of the Triangle changes over time, particularly when the child becomes independent and the parent is not "needed" at the lesson anymore. This usually happens around the age of 13 or 14, when the student is ready for a new level of responsibility. The student becomes responsible for the fulfillment of expectations in the lessons and at home. This is a significant change, since the responsibility shifts from the parent to the student while still maintaining open communication

between all parties. Some parents are fine with this, even welcoming the change. For others, it is difficult to let go and allow the space for independent growth. It is important for parents to understand that gradually giving the space to grow is essential in personal development and independence. Furthermore, growth does not get rid of the parental role; rather, it simply changes it.

I really enjoy this point in the learning and growing process. As they begin to find their way in the world, I get to know who these little children really are as people. Though they are still connected to their parents, they begin venturing out and creating their own independent relationships and perspectives.

THE TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES

TEACHER to STUDENT:

The teacher's role in relation to the student varies, from a friend students can confide in to a positive authority figure. Goals for the student must be congruent with the student's needs and abilities. Every child is different, so expectations cannot be the same for everyone. Students are unique individuals and should be treated with great respect.

In the studio, the teacher is responsible for clear and comprehensive information delivery, motivating the student to rise to each challenge and creating realistic, attainable goals for the student along with the parents. Finding which techniques or approaches the student best responds to is crucial; this may involve varying levels of physical guidance, demonstrations, compliments, and a sense of humor.

When we have a student who studies with us for many years, we are a constant life influence. I have been told by several families that I was the only other consistent person in their child's life, similar to a family member. This comment really stopped me in my tracks and made me take a good look at the importance of my relationship with both the child and their parents. As teachers, we may see our students two or three times a week for lessons, and it is important that we show personal interest in their lives and hold high expectations for them. Humor, too, is so important with my students. I love having fun with them, but we also get down to work.

As a student gains independence, our role as teacher changes as well. Music is inherently intimate, so we are often the first adults with whom students get to try out their budding adult personalities. We must take great care in letting them express themselves personally and musically. We are asking them to express themselves emotionally through music, and expressing feelings at this stage of their lives is often scary and embarrassing. We must find a way to give them a safe haven to do this. As teachers, we bear witness to this very fragile stage of life in the guise of music; this is a great gift for which we must have the utmost respect.

TEACHER to PARENT:

Parents are experts at knowing their kids. No matter the student's age, the parent has known them longer. By respecting the parent's relationship with his or her child, the teacher shows true care for the student's well-being and growth. Teachers must realize that parents are entrusting them with their child's musical direction; maintaining a good relationship means working with them, not against them.

As teachers, we have several responsibilities to the parents. First, we must clearly communicate our expectations to both parents and students. We should maintain a supportive approach and a positive outlook in the vision we are creating with the parent for the student. Teaching the student should be an ongoing process of discovering how to best help the student learn.

We should be patient and encouraging when asking students to learn difficult concepts and praise them when they have made an achievement. Making lessons creative, fun and enjoyable takes time. As teachers, we must keep current and continue to grow as educators by regularly attending workshops, master classes and seminars.

THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

STUDENT to TEACHER:

The student's primary responsibilities to the teacher are actively participating, listening intently and committing to regular practice at home. It is essential that a student demonstrates respect and the desire to learn. When a concept is unclear, the student should communicate this to the teacher by asking questions to enhance understanding. When practicing at home, the student should strive for patience with difficult passages and repetitions. As the student grows older, being aware of personal strengths and weaknesses is essential.

STUDENT to PARENT:

At home, the parent acts as the primary authority, and the student must respect this role. The student must listen to the parent and ask questions when needed. Through practice, students should learn to strive for progress through engaging the focused mind. Mistakes happen, but the student must take the time to recognize why a mistake was made and how it can be avoided. A student's communication to the parent at home is vital for a positive learning environment.

Students have multiple interests, and there will come a time, often around the age of 12, when they must decide whether to continue study. The parent and teacher should be involved in this discussion. At this point, the student will be gaining independence and must take on responsibilities willingly. Greatness takes a tremendous amount of effort and patience, and few students will rise to the task alone. Teachers and parents should act as role models and offer personal guidance.

Throughout the student's musical journey, the relationship between teacher, student and parent must constantly be assessed and adjusted. When these three roles are united in a common goal, equally devoted to the student's continued success with their instrument, each student will achieve his or her highest potential.