

DEDHAM –

Dedham School of Music: An age-by-age guide to music education

By Gabriella Sanna

Wicked Local Dedham

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The benefits of playing musical instruments are proven and plentiful. Children and young adults who are exposed to music training tend to do better academically, especially in math, and engage in less risky behaviors, such as drinking alcohol. Learning a musical instrument teaches kids how to think and act creatively while persevering with a task that is difficult and requires constant practice, helping them to gain self-esteem once they master it. And playing with a band or orchestra teaches the value of teamwork. But what is the right age to begin playing? If you wait too long, do you miss a golden opportunity? The good news is, there is no magical age, and parents can do much to foster music appreciation, even if they never picked up instruments as children.

Birth to preschool:

The emphasis should be on exposure to music and learning to combine music and movement. Take your child to concerts, especially ones that welcome children and give them a place to dance. There are also structured programs that combine music and movement. Play a variety of music genres for your child – classical, jazz, kids' tunes, rock, dance – and give them space to dance around. Join them on the “dance floor.” You might also purchase (or make!) musical instruments – things like maracas, drums, and tambourines let small children express their emotions and learn to move to the music!

Preschool and up:

Small children, even as young as 3, can take violin or cello lessons using the Suzuki method. This method was created by Dr Shinichi Suzuki, a self-taught violinist, who sought to teach music to children in the same way they learn to speak – through listening, imitation, and repetition. It is an effective way to teach all children – you need not be raising a Mozart!

Elementary school:

If your child is in the Dedham Public Schools grades three through five, he or she can elect to take music lessons. This year the Dedham School of Music in partnership with the Dedham Public Schools will begin an orchestra program for students interested in violin, viola, or cello. Students as young as 3rd grade may begin one of these string instruments. For students entering 5th grade, the popular 5th Grade Band program will continue, now in its third year.

If your child will choose to play an instrument, he or she will select the instrument near the beginning of the school year. This is a big decision for them, and it's important that they feel like it's their decision to make. It doesn't matter that you played trumpet in your high school band – if they want to play the drums, that's the path they should take. Realize that your child may choose an instrument but decide that he or she doesn't like it. Give them the option, at the end of the school year, to re-evaluate the choice, determine why they didn't like it, and select a different instrument, rather than simply giving up on music altogether.

For children who are already playing a musical instrument:

Maybe you find that interest and/or motivation is waning and your child isn't picking up the instrument as much as you'd like. Take an interest in the music. Encourage your child to learn a piece that he or she can play for you. Hold a mini concert in the living room where all of the family members gather around to listen. Ask your child's teacher how often and how long your child should be practicing and help your child to designate a time and quiet space to practice.

One of the greatest gifts of parenting is the moments we can watch our children at play. Combining movement and music for youngsters allows us to be an active part of that playtime. And as they grow and move away from childhood games, we can revel in watching their determination and enjoyment in playing a musical instrument.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, finding a music program for your child, or the programs at the Dedham Public Schools, please do not hesitate to contact the Dedham school of Music at 781 441-9372, or email gsanna@dedhamschooolofmusic.org. Also visit www.dedhamschooolofmusic.org.

Gabriella Sanna is the executive director of the Dedham School of Music.

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