

Convenience Does Not Always Equal Quality:

When choosing a location, or teacher, for your child's music lesson, parents often think more about convenience and less about ensuring that their child receives a quality music education. Busy schedules often force parents to choose a music teacher due to the location of the teacher's studio, or because the teacher will come to their home for lessons. While convenience is definitely a factor when deciding on a teacher, it should not be the only factor taken into consideration. Below are five other things to look for when deciding on your next teacher.

A proper environment is not just a room with a piano in it.

In most homes, a piano sits in the most popular area of the house. This is usually an open space, where you can listen to the phone ring, the bell ring, the dog bark, the siblings running around, etc. Well, this environment is not suitable for learning an instrument, because a child is always distracted by everything else that goes on around the house and so is the instructor. In most studios, the environment is specifically designed to foster music growth. Whether it is the surroundings that introduce your child to different aspects of music, or the sights and sounds of other kids their age taking music lessons, the environment at a studio helps to get your child in the mood for lessons. Most professional studios are well equipped with a tuned piano, a keyboard and sometimes a computer lab. They also have many piano books, and are quiet and nicely decorated. It is important for the learning process of a child to know that they are going somewhere "special" to learn their lessons. This allows your child to step outside the everyday box he/she calls home and allows them to find the musical talents hidden inside

An "in-home" instructor is limited and less prepared.

By not having access to their studio equipment, an instructor, no matter how experienced they are, is less prepared, limited for lessons, and cannot respond to your child's spontaneous questions appropriately.

Because the instructors do not have access to their many resources, if a child needs a last minute handout to improve his/her lessons, the teacher must postpone giving the hand-out until next week when the instructor returns. It makes the instructor less efficient and less spontaneous towards your child's education. This ruins the continuity of the lesson and ultimately slows down the child's learning. Since instructors often charge more to come to your home, the fact that they cannot be as prepared, as somebody teaching out of their studio, means you are paying more to receive less.

Instructor's experience and educational background counts, not just their nice personality.

Unfortunately, many music instructors who come to your home, have less experience teaching, or do not have the appropriate degree(s). They also many times work other jobs than just teaching, which means that they have less time to plan your child's lesson and increase their own knowledge as an instructor. Most of the time, an instructor that only teaches lessons are more devoted to their profession and to better themselves as well, which means, they can offer more learning opportunities to your child. An experienced instructor should offer the parents, and the child, *at least* a policies sheet in which states their policies, their background, and recital/performance opportunities for the child, etc. A good instructor should adopt a methodology book adequate for the child's age and level, but also expand the child's learning to other pieces outside the books. Many instructors are not prepared to teach outside the books, because it is easier to teach only the books and nothing else. Teaching a child how to compose their own music is not an easy task, neither is to teach each student different pieces outside the books. It takes extra time, effort and money for an instructor to find a particular piece at the correct level and age for a student to learn. Unfortunately, this is the reason many instructors will not teach a child the songs that the child wants to learn, but instead will just follow the books. The books are great and necessary but alone, they do not provide for a well-rounded music education.

At my studio, students have access to a computer games to reinforce their lesson for the day and they can learn how to compose their own music as well. They pick their own songs and they receive it for free. Today, lessons are no longer what they used to be. Children need more than just learning how to play the piano; they need to experience it, they need the knowledge and the flexibility. They need the room to be able to explore, be themselves, and be respected for their own learning style and development, and not just follow the instructor's favorite style.

Instructors studio at their home also has to be appropriate.

So, you think, ok, I will take my child to the instructor's studio instead. I am convinced that it is better, right? Well, your research is still not over. Most instructors that have been teaching for a while, and are stable in their profession, have accumulated many things over the years. Therefore, they understand how important it is to have a separate room of the house as a studio, not just for everything they own, but for the same reasons you don't want to have your child be taught at your own home: distraction. It is not enough for you to go to their home for lessons, but it is important that the instructor does not teach out of their living room as well.

There are many questions you want to ask yourself and an instructor: Why does a very good teacher not have a separate room in the house just for teaching? Do they have any pets? And if they do, where are they? Is the instructor innovative? How long ago did they take a lesson themselves, or participated of a music convention or a professional organization? Do they have an *updated* computer lab to offer to their students for exercises? Are they constantly trying to improve their lessons? Is the teacher open minded to follow your child's own style? Do they offer recitals? How many? Do they

provide a teaching area that is positive, clean, organized, quiet, and suitable for an appropriate learning environment? What else do they offer for your child's lesson?

Finding a good music instructor is like finding a good doctor.

You have to try lessons before you "buy it". Every good instructor with long time experience will offer "Paid Trial Lessons". This is a chance for you to meet the teacher, see the studio, and try a lesson to see if the instructor's teaching style matches your child's learning style. I always advise parents to try different instructors in your area before making a final decision. You want to check for education background, teaching experience, recital options, competition options, computer lab options, and most importantly you want to find someone who is compatible with you and your child. It is important to research, compare and contrast instructors before signing up for lessons. You want to make sure that you are not only getting the most for your money, but that your child, or yourself, is getting a well-rounded music education. I know that some mothers, will drive further, if they have to, for a good teacher, a good coach, a good school that they believe is best for their child. I also know that most parents feel the same way because as an instructor, I have students coming from many different areas, some quite far, to take lessons with me.

Remember, all instructors are not perfect. Some have restricted policies and others are too open-minded, what is important is that you happy and you can see your child progress constantly through lessons. Any instrument playing is a long learning process; you need time and practice to get better at it, but it does not mean by far, your child can not learn how to play something recognizable and fun in a short period of time.

Do not assume it is true if a music teacher tells you that you do not have talent for music or that you are not ready to play "Happy Birthday" for your mom's party. If that is the case, find another teacher. I have seem too many talented children be "put down" by old-fashioned or inexperienced teachers who do not want to go out of their lesson plan to teach something fun or even important to the child's education. Less expensive or more expensive is not always better. You have to weigh the costs and all the facts from each teacher to make an informed decision. It is well worth paying more (or less) and driving 20 miles away, if you have to, for a very good instructor that you believe in. In the end, I truly believe that an instructor can help make or break a child's confidence and talent in music education. So, do your own research.

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