



Dear Parents,

We are delighted that your child is taking music classes with us at the Irish Music School of Chicago! Irish music is wonderfully fun to play and listen to, but it will take a lot of practice and listening time to be successful. It is very rare for a child to remember to play their instrument at home several times a week, and to know how to make the practice time effective. Your support, encouragement, involvement and reminders (sometimes daily) will make a big difference!

Below is a guide for you and your family to refer to in order to help your child succeed and have fun learning Irish music.

1. **LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN!** The most important aspect of learning traditional Irish music is to listen to it. We are mainly learning tunes that do not have words and these tunes can often, at first, sound all the same. We learn to play Irish music by hearing it first and then when we can hum or lilt along with it, we begin to try to play it. We will email you a recording of the tune we are currently studying. Please listen to it a lot. In order to make the most of practice time, your child must hum or sing along to the tune once it is very familiar. Your child must listen to it quite a few times in order to learn it. Singing a tune is a really good way to learn it. This will solidify the notes and the feel (phrasing, rhythm, lilt) of the tune, and will allow the student to work out the finer details of the music, such as rhythm, swing and musicality.
2. **PARTICIPATE IN LIVE MUSIC!** The Irish Music School of Chicago hosts a monthly, fun, family-friendly Hooley on the last Sunday of each month at Chief O'Neill's (3471 N. Elston Ave., Chicago). Our Hooley is run by the teachers of the Irish Music School of Chicago and involves playing, dancing and singing in the real, warm atmosphere of a great Irish restaurant. **This is the best way for your student and the rest of your family to have an authentic experience with Irish music and one of the most important parts of their learning experience!** Every student has a chance to participate and we often prepare pieces to perform at these Hooleys. Please mark your calendars for the last Sunday of every month to come and be a part of it and meet the other families and teachers in our school!
3. **KEEP THE INSTRUMENT VERY HANDY.** Keep it safe, but out in the open, right where it is easy to pick up and play. In plain view is the best.
4. **PRACTICE IN SMALL SNIPPETS.** Due to busy schedules, it can be difficult to find any long stretch of time to practice. However, it is highly effective to simply pick up the instrument for a few minutes at a time at various points throughout the day and week. This will keep the tunes fresh in your child's mind, and will help solidify the muscle memory of the fingers.
5. **FOCUS ON SPECIFIC SHORT TERM GOALS.** The goal for the practice time might be just to learn the first phrase of a new tune, or to play a more familiar tune three times without a mistake. We will provide specific goals to guide weekly practices. Following these ideas will allow the practice to end with success and not frustration!
6. **TRY NOT TO LEAVE PRACTICE UNTIL LATE AT NIGHT** when everyone is tired. A short practice in the morning or early evening will probably work better. Several short practice times a week are more useful than just one long one a week. At a very young age, even 10 minutes time is enough to make great progress! If practice time is not possible, just listening to the tune is important and helpful!
7. **IF YOU USED TO PLAY** an instrument, this is a great time to get it out again or take up a new one. Learning and playing alongside your child is a great experience.
8. **ENJOY A MUSICAL HOUSEHOLD.** Put Irish music (especially the tunes from the class) on in the morning, during dinner or in the car. This is a great way to be able to passively pick up the "Irish accent" while doing another activity. Have the music on in the background while your child does homework or plays games.

Thank you for providing this great gift to your kids. We are happy to answer any questions you have throughout this process.

For more advice and ideas about helping a child learn an instrument, check out some of these sources:

<http://www.bulletproofmusician.com/why-the-progress-in-the-practice-room-seems-to-disappear-overnight/>

<http://musiciansway.com/blog/2011/02/a-different-kind-of-slow-practice/>

<http://gocognitive.net/interviews/benefits-interleaving-practice>