

# *Parent Handbook*



**String Presence™ Academy**  
**Suzuki Violin Studio**  
**Megan Jenifer, Studio Owner**  
**Private Violin/Viola Instructor**  
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Dear Parents,

Congratulations on making the decision to have your child study the Suzuki method—or, more precisely, for making the decision to allow the Suzuki method to become part of your family life.

The Suzuki method should be one of the most rewarding and positive experiences you will share with your child, and I believe it can be a factor in strengthening the parent-child bond, thereby creating a new interest to be shared by the whole family.

Parents have the responsibility to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, which falls under four headings:

- ♪ **Play the Suzuki recordings at least twice daily.** Before long, you will notice your child humming the melodies. Children enjoy repetition and will not tire of the music unless they feel that their parents are bored or irritated. Remember, each time your child hears the recording, it will make the playing of that particular piece easier. He/She should be thoroughly familiar with the melodic line of each piece before attempting to learn it.
- ♪ **If you have some classical music in your record/tape or CD collection, play it and enjoy it!** Your child will watch you and learn to appreciate the things you do. Dr. Suzuki recommends familiarizing infants (from birth) with one specific piece and then gradually enlarging his/her musical repertoire. We also have several opportunities each year to expose our children to live performances: besides the Virginia Symphony, we have the Virginia Beach Symphony, the York River Orchestra, Bay Youth Orchestra, Young Musicians of Virginia, The Peninsula Youth Orchestra, the Hampton Roads Chamber Ensemble, and University Orchestras, which also have numerous concerts and recitals. As a common practice for small children, some parents take their children to half a concert and leave at intermission.
- ♪ **Try to arrange your schedule so you have time to practice together each day.** Some days there will never be a good time, but be persistent in trying to arrange times that will suit your household. I'm not a mother, but after talking to several Suzuki parents, they suggest practicing together twice a day for a short time: morning and afternoon. Morning is a good time to drill the current piece because it is the time the child is feeling rested and untroubled. The afternoon time is good for review pieces and related activities. Please note, however, that practicing right after an exhausting day of school is not a good idea. Some wise parents will say, "we can practice now, or we can do it in 30 minutes (or whenever), which would you prefer?" Once the child has made the choice, stick to it!
- ♪ **Keep it friendly!!!** This is the most difficult thing for most parents. We live in a competitive society. Parents want their children to excel. Do you remember when your child was a baby and said their first word? What could the child's reaction have been if those first cautious efforts had been revered with disapproval, contempt, or indifference? We know that a baby placed in the kind of environment just described fails to thrive, adapt socially, or maybe even to survive! Learning the violin under the Suzuki method is like learning a language, and the same excitement and encouragement **MUST** be present. When a little one has played "Mississippi Hot Dog" for 6 months and is still struggling, find something good to say, and find out how to encourage positively and constructively!! For example: your little one may have had a difficult time saying a

particular word, but rather than putting down their efforts, we tend to think of it as “baby talk” and accept what they can do at that particular time of their life. All the while, however, the child hears this word pronounced correctly by those around him and is gently encouraged to produce the same results themselves. Eventually, the correct word is produced and the whole family joins in the congratulations. The violin/viola (as well as most instruments) can be learned the same way—and should be! Don’t say “That sounds just awful!” or “you have worked on that song so long! I’m sick of it.” Or I don’t see why you can’t remember it!” I would rather encourage you to think of a justified compliment or statement: “That sounds better today than yesterday,” or each time we play this piece, let’s remember to check our bow hold—today we’ll watch the pinky, tomorrow we’ll watch your thumb, etc.” or “Can you sing the song in your head while you play?” or “You tell me what you think we should work on today.” Giving your child choices and some power to direct their own practice procedures and time is a good incentive. Be aware, however, that once an agreement has been reached, it is to be adhered to.

More thoughts on keeping it friendly—do not compare your child’s progress with that of another student, and do not discuss your child’s problems in front of him/her. Find a time when he/she is out of the room temporarily or call me on the phone. Also, do not rush your child to finish a piece! Each new skill lays the foundation for more complicated skills yet to come. Therefore it is important that we take small steps at a time and master each step before moving on to the next piece. If any of the early skills are rushed or forgotten, parent, child and teacher will pay in frustration later on! Students who are made to feel they must hurry to learn the notes, but not necessarily to develop the skills and techniques to make a polished piece, or who do not realize the importance of daily listening and practice, will not like the sound they produce and will wonder why they do not play well. Such a student will eventually arrive at a place where the technical demands of the music cannot be met, or they can’t produce a tone worthy of the music being attempted, or both.

Dr. Suzuki said we should visualize each child as a seed. When we plant a seed, we don’t expect it to shoot immediately; we carefully water, weed and tend to it. But we know that with the right treatment, the seed will eventually shoot—whether in a week, a month, or three months, growing slowly but surely at *its own pace*. One can not force, persuade or threaten a seed to grow any quicker and the same goes for a child.

One more very important point; it is very difficult for a parent to teach a child at home each week and then come to a lesson and not what to “help out.” PLEASE DON’T!!! You should have a notebook and pen at every lesson. Write down your questions or comments, but, unless asked for advice or help, please do not interfere with the lesson! If your child is trying to listen to both his/her parent and their instructor, they will become frustrated and confused. Dr. Suzuki stresses the point over and over that “one point per lesson” be taught. If your teacher is working on intonation and your child is playing with a straight bow thumb, don’t worry, because the teacher can see the thumb too. Don’t grimace or choke. Just sit, take notes and think how much more pleasant this is than doing the dishes! It is important that your child thinks you enjoy listening to them both at home and at lessons!

Remember, it is not so much our aim to produce a concert violinist/violist as it is to produce a person who possesses self-confidence and a good self-image, and one who appreciates good music!!!

Thanks again for your time and giving your child the gift of music. This will serve as a useful, lifelong tool.

Very Respectfully,



Megan Jenifer

## **Ten Key Elements of the Suzuki Talent Education Philosophy**

### **1. Begin Early**

- ♪ Children begin learning from their environment from birth. Suzuki has found that children can often learn by musical instruction very well at about the age of three, and in some cases even earlier. Teaching in the U.S. has substantiated this belief.

### **2. Learn by Memory**

- ♪ Suzuki calls his approach the “Mother Tongue” method. All learning in the early years is without printed music. Children learn by small steps, hence memory is developed in a gradual manner until it becomes a high skill. Small children have an almost uncanny ability to work in this manner, the “natural” manner of language learning.

### **3. Creative Repetition**

- ♪ The analogy to language learning is obvious, since the small child is encouraged to say the same words over and over again until they are mastered and easily used. Suzuki limits the amount of material on any given level and encourages much repetition.

### **4. Active Repertory of all Pieces Learned**

- ♪ In one’s native tongue, one never gets to the point where a word is learned only to be forgotten. The Suzuki student constantly reviews the repertoire he/she has learned, and then effectively reinforces their memory, their technical skill, and their musical expression.

### **5. Listening to Recordings**

- ♪ As the mother speaks often to her child, so the violin student hears recordings of the pieces he/she is to learn and gains expectation of fine violin, cello or piano tone. This is their environment at home which determines so much of their learning.

### **6. Involvement with the Parent**

- ♪ Mothers or Fathers attend every lesson with their child; encourage him/her and help him/her practice at home each day. The parent becomes the child’s assistant responsible for playing the recordings, encouraging the child, teaching the notes (by rote) and skills, and practicing with the child.

### **7. Encouragement**

- ♪ The mother of a small child doesn’t scold her infant for mispronouncing the words he/she is learning, but encourages him/her to say it again, and again. Likewise, the Suzuki parent must always encourage the child. The lessons should be a happy experience, and the parent and teacher become involved in the marvel of the unfolding process of learning.

## **8. Step-by-Step Mastery**

- ♪ Each skill is broken down into small segments easily mastered by the student. It is imperative that these segments (and, later, pieces) be thoroughly mastered before attempting the next step, so as to engineer a “built in” success for each step in the learning process. This takes skill on the part of the teacher to assess the potential and limitations of learning at a given point in order to effectively challenge the learner.

## **9. Reading after Physical Control**

- ♪ This approach is also analogous to native language learning. A child speaks before he/she learns to read. By no means, however, should memory learning be dropped when one starts to read notes!

## **10. Every Child Can Learn**

- ♪ Eliminate the talent test, and believe that they can learn to play the violin or any other instrument.

### **Recommended Reading:**

*To Learn with Love* by William and Constance Starr

*Nurtured By Love* by Shinichi Suzuki

*Ability Development from Age Zero* by Shinichi Suzuki

*How To Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by A. Faber & E. Mazlish

## **Studio Policy**

### **2009-2010 School Year**

#### **1. Tuition is due in full at the beginning of each month**

- ♪ During the school year, studio time is considered equal to class time, thus payment is treated as a monthly tuition.
- ♪ Like school, if the child is absent for any reason, the class time is not made up, but the class work has to be made up. In regard to lessons, there will be no make-up lessons during the school year. However, the objectives that the student was required to meet the previous week should be reinforced continuously for the following week.
- ♪ If tuition is not received at the beginning of the month, there is a \$10.00 late fee that will be added to your invoice.
- ♪ This payment method helps us all to budget easier and keep track of payments.
- ♪ It requires me the teacher to meet all lessons on time and at their scheduled time.
- ♪ It discourages last minute and frequent cancellations by the student.
- ♪ It maintains a healthy and consistent learning environment by minimizing absences.
- ♪ Requires at least a 1 year (school year) commitment from the student and the parent.

#### **2. During the summer months (July & August), tuition is flexible.**

- ♪ Make-up lessons are allowed during the summer months in a master class schedule. There will be one day that will be scheduled for make-ups per month, and students can sign up for times that will best suit their schedule.
  - Only one make-up lesson due to student cancellation is allowed per month.
  - I, the teacher, should be notified at least 24 hours in advance
  - Certain exceptions can be considered at my discretion.
  - As a general rule, try only to reschedule one time per month and give 24 hours notice.

#### **3. I, the teacher, am required to make up any lesson that I had to cancel due to an unexpected emergency, a performance, or a recording session.**

- ♪ I usually make all appointments on time unless there is an unforeseen circumstance.
- ♪ I am a performing and recording musician, so there will be times where I may be absent. If I know ahead of time of the performance or recording session,

that will be mentioned at the beginning of the month when payment for that month's lessons are due.

- ♪ I will not make a habit of canceling or rescheduling lessons.
- ♪ Should the decision be made to discontinue or withdraw your child from the studio, a 2 week notification is required prior to the child's last formal lesson. If notification comes before that, 2 weeks worth of payment is required to account for that reserved time. Again, please be advised that a 1 year (school year) commitment is required.

#### 4. Studio Prices:

30 minute lessons: \$85 per month

45 minute lessons: \$127 per month

60 minute lessons: \$170 per month

\*Group Class : \$25 per person (\*\* for 120 minutes monthly)

\*group lessons are in addition to private lessons; they are not to be used to replace private instruction

\*\*Group lessons are held at Quality Music Center on every 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month from 1pm-3pm (300A N. Battlefield Blvd. Chesapeake VA

Parent Preparation Course: \$78 per session (6-7 week session 90 minutes each)

**Additional fees:** late fee - \$10

Travel fee - \$5

Venue rental fee – if necessary, will be determined  
depending on the venue and number of participants.

Accompanist fee – for recitals and outside performances,  
may vary depending on the number of participants  
and length of program.

## **Student and Parent Responsibilities**

- ♪ The instrument should be maintained in good repair at all times!
- ♪ Please be prompt with beginning and ending lessons. Like any profession where scheduling is back-to-back, I may run a few minutes late from time to time, but I will make every effort to keep promptly on time as a courtesy to all students. If a student is late by 15 minutes or more, their lesson may be shortened by that amount of time.
- ♪ Parents!!! PLEASE do NOT wait until your child's lesson is over to bring up a point of discussion. This can be highly frustrating to the student following you! Either discuss your thoughts at the beginning of each lesson, or contact me later either by phone or email. This is especially important if there are students waiting for their lesson.
- ♪ Immediately, prior to the child's lesson time, go to the bathroom. Upon entering the studio, lower your voices to a whisper. Quietly take your instrument out of its case, and quietly observe the lesson being taught. Do all these little jobs before your lesson begins.
- ♪ Siblings are welcome to come to lessons, but they are not to be let loose in the studio! They must sit or play quietly without distracting. You should consider bringing something for them to do such as coloring or playing with a quiet toy.

The following list contains a summary of additional Student/Parent Responsibilities.

1. Student Responsibilities:
  - a. Cooperate during practice and lessons.
  - b. Wash hands, trim nails, get a drink, and go to the bathroom before daily practice and before each lesson.
  - c. Treat parents and teachers with respect.
  - d. Listen to the recordings daily.
2. Parent Responsibilities:
  - a. Pay promptly and in full for all lessons.
  - b. Attend all scheduled classes
    - \* Exception for TAA parents ONLY if unable because of work.
  - c. Maintain the instrument in good condition at all times
  - d. Do not interfere with the lessons, but take notes or record each lesson as directed by the teacher.
  - e. Organize home practice and set daily time aside for that purpose.
  - f. Follow through on all assignments given by the teacher, including practicing, overseeing specific assignments with the student, etc.
  - g. Play the recording daily.
  - h. Do not try to instruct or teach a new concept. You are the teacher's assistant.

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read, understood and will adhere to the policy and guidelines mentioned.

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Signature of student or parent or guardian if  
the student is less than 18 years of age

---

Date



## **Student and Parent Responsibilities**

- ♪ The instrument should be maintained in good repair at all times!
- ♪ Please be prompt with beginning and ending lessons. Like any profession where scheduling is back-to-back, I may run a few minutes late from time to time, but I will make every effort to keep promptly on time as a courtesy to all students. If a student is late by 15 minutes or more, their lesson may be shortened by that amount of time.
- ♪ Parents!!! PLEASE do NOT wait until your child's lesson is over to bring up a point of discussion. This can be highly frustrating to the student following you! Either discuss your thoughts at the beginning of each lesson, or contact me later either by phone or email. This is especially important if there are students waiting for their lesson.
- ♪ Immediately, prior to the child's lesson time, go to the bathroom. Upon entering the studio, lower your voices to a whisper. Quietly take your instrument out of its case, and quietly observe the lesson being taught. Do all these little jobs before your lesson begins.
- ♪ Siblings are welcome to come to lessons, but they are not to be let loose in the studio! They must sit or play quietly without distracting. You should consider bringing something for them to do such as coloring or playing with a quiet toy.

The following list contains a summary of additional Student/Parent Responsibilities.

### 3. Student Responsibilities:

- a. Cooperate during practice and lessons.
- b. Wash hands, trim nails, get a drink, and go to the bathroom before daily practice and before each lesson.
- c. Treat parents and teachers with respect.
- d. Listen to the recordings daily.

### 4. Parent Responsibilities:

- a. Pay promptly and in full for all lessons.
- b. Attend all scheduled classes
  - \* Exception for TAA parents ONLY if unable because of work.
- c. Maintain the instrument in good condition at all times
- d. Do not interfere with the lessons, but take notes or record each lesson as directed by the teacher.
- e. Organize home practice and set daily time aside for that purpose.
- f. Follow through on all assignments given by the teacher, including practicing, overseeing specific assignments with the student, etc.
- g. Play the recording daily.
- h. Do not try to instruct or teach a new concept. You are the teacher's assistant.

By signing below, you acknowledge that you have read, understood and will adhere to the policy and guidelines mentioned.

---

Signature of student or parent or guardian if  
the student is less than 18 years of age

---

Date

### New/Current Student Registration Form

Name of Student (First & Last): \_\_\_\_\_

Student Birthday: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's or Guardian's names: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Mobil or Pager: \_\_\_\_\_ \*Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Length of violin/viola study \_\_\_\_\_

Where, if applicable, was study done previously? \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for leaving: \_\_\_\_\_

Other previous musical or instrumental study: \_\_\_\_\_

Average amount of daily practice time: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Piece and Method studying if applicable:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parent's previous musical background if applicable:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Lesson time preferences (day and time) 1<sup>st</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_ 2<sup>nd</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_ 3<sup>rd</sup>: \_\_\_\_\_

Times will be scheduled based on convenience for the teacher. **You will be notified by EMAIL** of your lesson time one week prior to your first lesson.

\*TAA: Monday from 9 am – 1pm

Thursday from 9 am –12:30 pm

**Please do not write below this line**

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Date and time of first lesson: \_\_\_\_\_

Frequency: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Fee:\$\_\_\_\_\_per \_\_\_\_\_.

## **Beginning Student Requirements**

- ♪ Box violin (CH1) or real violin \*\*\* depending upon the age of the child
- ♪ Suzuki Violin School Volume 1 Book \*\* (SB1)
- ♪ Suzuki Violin School Volume 1 CD (CDVS1) or Tape (CAV1) \*\*
- ♪ Chromatic Tuner \*\* (KT30)
- ♪ Rosin (usually comes with the purchased or rented instrument) \*\*
- ♪ 2 notebooks (one for the parent and one for the student) for assignments and notes
- ♪ 2 pencils
- ♪ Folder for books, notes and supplementary materials
- ♪ Lint free cloth to clean off the instrument after each use \*\* (1133U)

The following items may be required at a later time when the teacher deems appropriate or necessary:

- ♪ Collapsible music stand for at-home practice (400NB)
- ♪ Shoulder Rest \*\* (Item numbers vary by type and size)
- ♪ *I Can Read Music* by Joanne Martin (SB181)
- ♪ *Rhythmic Training* by Robert Starrer
- ♪ Tone Shaper (TS1)
- ♪ An extra set of strings \*\* (Item numbers vary by brand, tension, desired tone color and size).

Upon advancement in the studio, students will be required to purchase scale books, appropriate etude books and sheet music.

\*\* These items can be found in various music stores including Music Art & Mind, Quality Music Center, Music and Arts, The Flute Tooter, Moe's Music, AL & M, and Agan Music Company <http://www.aganmusic.com>.

Other items can be ordered by any of the listed music stores or they can be purchased by phone, fax or online at <http://www.sharmusic.com> . The SHAR item numbers are listed beside the items in parentheses.

\*\*\*Violins can be purchased or rented from any of these locations. However, my first recommendation for purchasing or renting a violin or viola would be from Potter's Violin Company 1-800-317-9452 or <http://www.pottersviolins.com> . The desired model is either the Rudoulf Doetsch or Wilhelm Klier model. These models are rather expensive, but the craftsmanship and quality are top of the line and highly recommended by Suzuki Teachers all over the world. The rental policy from Potters is also more flexible than local policies. In the event that the price range for buying is not feasible for your budget, there are still beginning student models of great quality that can be purchased for less than \$200! There are still lesser-quality models that can be purchased for much less on the internet, however, the student will eventually come into severe limitations on an "economy" instrument. I recommend that you purchase the highest quality instrument that you can afford. It will ensure that your child is developing ability without physical impairment. I am more than willing to help you with the process.

## String Presence™ Observation Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Observer \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Observed \_\_\_\_\_

Student's approx. age \_\_\_\_\_ Boy \_\_\_\_\_ Girl \_\_\_\_\_ Group \_\_\_\_\_ Level \_\_\_\_\_

How was the student greeted at the beginning of the lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did the greeting influence the lesson? \_\_\_\_\_ How? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Was posture and/or position stressed? \_\_\_\_\_ What Specifically did the teacher do to set the student up properly, or to reinforce proper playing habits?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Suzuki stresses one point per lesson. What was the "key" point the teacher was working on? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How did the teacher help the child to accomplish this "key" point? (look for games, listening, singing, exaggeration, separation of right and left hand, repetition, etc. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What instructions were given directly to the parent? To the student? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What did the parent do during the lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Were the parent's actions supportive of the student? \_\_\_\_\_

Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Were they supportive of the teacher? \_\_\_\_\_ Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What was your opinion of the triangle Suzuki speaks of: parent, child, teacher—each respecting, supporting and encouraging each other?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did the teacher ignore some aspects of the student's playing that were not exactly right? If so, Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What, in your opinion, was accomplished at the lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Did the teacher make expectations very clear to both parent and student? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Parents, please note:** all points may not be pertinent to each lesson you observe.

## **References**

*Between Parent and Teacher* by Susan Kempter

*Games and Motivation for the Suzuki Violin Student* by Diane Wagstaff

*A Parent's Guide to the Suzuki Method* by Alitna Thornton

*Nurtured by Love* by Shinichi Suzuki

*Parent Handbook* by Dannielle Weems-Elliott