

VSSA Parent Handbook

Welcome to VSSA! The purpose of this handbook is to familiarize you with our provisions, services, and expectations so that you can help your child make the most of his participation in our group lessons.

YOUR CHILD'S SUCCESS

Because our purpose is to serve valley Suzuki students/families, our activities and services are designed accordingly. As your child participates in our program, your commitment to the following philosophical components of the Suzuki method will help your child enjoy and feel successful within our program:

The Suzuki Approach

Courtesy of Libby Dixon and Molly Johnson, Suzuki Violin Teachers in Oberlin, Ohio

The Suzuki approach, based on the so-called "mother-tongue" method, differs from traditional methods of teaching instrumental music because it involves the student at a very early age, thus necessitating much participation on the part of the parent (usually the mother) in the role of home-teacher. Some of the basic principles and ingredients of the Suzuki approach are:

- 1. Begin as early as possible. Dr. Suzuki recommends that ability development begins at birth. Formal training may be started by age 3.**
- 2. Move in small steps so the child can master the material with a total sense of success, thereby building his confidence and enthusiasm for learning. Each child progresses at his own pace.**
- 3. Either the mother or father attends all lessons so that (s)he understands the learning process, and can feel secure when working with the child as home-teacher. To this end, the parent receives initial instruction in correct playing posture and all of the beginning steps including the playing of a simple piece. The most important single ingredient for success is the parent's willingness to devote regular time to work closely with the child and the teacher.**
- 4. Daily listening to recordings of the Suzuki repertoire, as well as good music in general, is the nucleus of the Suzuki approach. The more the student listens to his records [CD's] and tapes, the more quickly he learns. The approach derives from the way all normal children learn to speak their native language.**
- 5. Postpone music reading until the child's aural and instrumental skills are well established, just as we teach children to read a language only after they can speak. This enables the main focus of the teacher's and student's attention to be on the sound; beautiful tone, accurate intonation, and musical phrasing then become a basic part of the student's earliest training.**
- 6. Follow the Suzuki repertory sequence, for the most part, so that each piece becomes a building block for the careful development of technique. Equally important is the strong motivation this standardized repertoire provides; students want to play what they hear other students play. Constant repetition of the old pieces in a student's repertoire is the secret of the performing ability of Suzuki students.**
- 7. Create in lessons and home practice an enjoyable learning environment, so that much of the child's motivation comes from enthusiasm for learning and desire to please. When working**

with children we should remember Dr. Suzuki's exhortation that we must come "down to their physical limitations and up to their sense of wonder and awe."

- 8. Group lessons, in addition to private lessons, and observation of other student's lessons are valuable aids to motivation. The child learns from advanced students and from his peers possibly more than he does from his adult teacher directly-children love to do what they see other children do.**
- 9. Foster an attitude of cooperation not competition among students, of supportiveness for each other's accomplishments.**

The Suzuki approach deals with much more than teaching a child how to play an instrument. It seeks to develop the whole child, to help unfold his natural potential to learn and become a good and happy person. The purpose of Suzuki training is not to produce great artists, but to help every child to find the joy that comes through music-making. Through the Suzuki growing process, children thrive in a total environment of support; they develop confidence and self-esteem, determination to try difficult things, self-discipline and concentration, as well as a lasting enjoyment of music, and the sensitivity and skill for making music.

VSSA parents, if you feel you need more guidance about how to better serve your child in any of these areas, ask your private teacher for specific ideas. We also have a Lending Library which contains a wonderful collection of Suzuki-related resource books and videos which you can use for further enrichment. If you are interested in borrowing something, please ask a group teacher or a board member about using the library.

COMMUNICATIONS

Newsletters

You will receive 4 newsletters which are distributed at group lessons. In addition to articles, practice ideas, and the like, these newsletters contain important information about approaching events. Input is welcomed about subjects you would like to have covered in the Newsletter, or calendar events such as concerts in the area, studio recitals, or individual book recitals. A free Classified Ad section is also available for use by VSSA members. If you wish to sell or give away a used instrument (if selling, include your name, instrument and size, price, and contact information), shoulder rest, black and white performance outfit, reading book, or other appropriate item, make your submission to our Newsletter Coordinator.

Web-site

If you have not visited our web-site at www.valleysuzuki.org, please do so. Familiarize yourself with what it contains so that if you have questions about VSSA during the year, you will know how to quickly find the answers you need. Newsletters are uploaded onto the site, so if you miss a class, visit the website to see if a new newsletter is listed so you can get the important updates you missed.

Information/Sign-In Table

Please sign in at the Information Table each time you attend group lessons. Also check for handouts, flyers, Performance Sign-Up, newsletters, etc. as this table is a main vehicle for distributing hard copies of the information we need you to know.

GROUP LESSONS

Pre-Twinkle Repertoire Class

In order to make this first violin/cello class experience a positive experience, feel free at anytime to have your child sit with you and just watch, or to do the activity yourself while your child watches. Children learn through observation as well as participation. Your child will appreciate your efforts to help him feel comfortable and successful in class. The Pre-Twinkle stage is often the most difficult time for a parent to recognize the accomplishments his child is making – remember to look for and celebrate every step of progress or improvement.

Twinkle Repertoire Class and beyond

In accord with the Suzuki approach, we ask that you continue to attend all lessons in support of your child. Many of our repertoire teachers intentionally plan activities to involve you in your child's group experience beyond the Pre-Twinkle level.

Facility Use

VSSA does not have the privilege of owning our own facility. We must therefore borrow a site in which to conduct our group lessons/activities. Even though we pay rent for our use, we are still guests. Prior to attending group, please discuss with your child that the items in the facility we use (instruments, computers, games, equipment, etc) are not for our use. Remind them, as needed, to respect the property within the rooms we use. If you bring older or younger siblings with you to group lessons, please also bring a supply of quiet activities for them. We do understand that another person's property is more enticing to your child than the toys he always plays with, so if you feel it would be helpful, make arrangements to "swap" toys with another parent in our program who is also bringing siblings to group.

WORKSHOP

VSSA hosts an annual Workshop for our families. Your group lesson fees **include the cost of this special full-day workshop**. There is a nominal registration fee. We feel that working with guest clinicians is very motivating and enriching for the students in our program and hope that every student will be able take advantage of this provision! Reserve the entire day for the workshop, and make sure to register when the Workshop Registration brochures come out. This is always such a "boost" to the children/families who take part.

The Workshop requires a lot of extra planning, preparation, and "man energy". Workshop Volunteer Forms are distributed at the information table prior to the workshop and we ask you to volunteer to help if you are able.

RECITALS

We will be conducting enough recitals this year to accommodate every student who wishes to share their excellence with the other students, parents, and teachers in VSSA. The twenty minute recitals are held between the two class times.

Several weeks prior to the recital in which your child is performing, talk with your private teacher to select an appropriate review piece. Work with your child bring his recital piece to the highest level of mastery of which he is capable. This thorough preparation will help him approach the performance with confidence. To give him even more confidence, you may want to provide several practice performance opportunities (in his recital outfit or not) for smaller or even pretend audiences prior to the recital. An accompanist will perform with your child and if you would like to come early on the recital day to practice with her, she is available for this.

BOOK PROMOTION

Our Book Promotion is another opportunity for you and your private teacher to help your child demonstrate and celebrate his excellence. As a beginner your child won't be ready to participate yet, but please take part in this valuable experience as soon as your child qualifies! We have designed our Book Promotion requirements in a way to set your child up for success. A student participating must be half way through the next book, ensuring that the pieces your child will be recording are already thoroughly mastered pieces. When your child qualifies, talk with your private teacher and begin the recording process early in September. Record the two pieces required for your book level in lesson or, if your teacher prefers, record at home and give the tape to her to critique. Your teacher may have suggestions for areas to improve before again recording. Work together until you, your child, and your teacher feel you have a recording demonstrating your child's best effort. Deadline for tape submission is in early October.

VSSA GROUP PERFORMANCES

Dress for all VSSA performances is black dress pants or skirt, white top (no t-shirts please), black shoes preferred.

In addition to our Winter Concert/Book Promotion Celebration Concert, VSSA may provide another group performance opportunity. When a performance is approaching, please make special note of the pieces listed for the concert and give these pieces special review priority in your daily practice. Even if your child is not going to be able to perform in the concert with us, these pieces will be the focus of their repertoire classes for the two or three lessons proceeding the concert. It would therefore benefit your child to have them well-reviewed.

ASA MEMEBERSHIP

VSSA recommends that you join our state organization, the Arizona Suzuki Association. As a VSSA member, through us, you may be able take advantage of ASA's "group rate" and join for the year at the discounted rate of \$5 per family. Membership benefits include newsletters (more ideas and enrichment!), and the opportunity to participate in their workshop and other provisions. We encourage you to sign up to attend their wonderful workshop.

NON-PROFIT STATUS

As you work with us, please keep in mind that we are a non-profit organization and that our board members are therefore serving VSSA and **volunteering** their time and energies without financial compensation (unless they have a student in the program and are able to take advantage of our board tuition waiver/discount benefit). We want to serve you the best we are able, so if you have suggestions for improvement, please share them with your private teacher to pass along to us.

We hope you and your child have a wonderful year in our program!