

Parents hum and sing with the songs If parents say they “can’t sing”, are “tone deaf”...

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Ask parents and kids to hum and sing with the songs. If parents say they “can’t sing”, are “tone deaf”, or that their “singing will hurt their children’s ears”, tell the parents that they CAN learn to sing and they are NOT “tone deaf”, proven by their language fluency, that nobody is tone deaf (no child talks in a monotone with monorhythm). Show them how their speaking contains musical pitch and rhythm. Show them how subtle and complex is their mastery of their spoken language. Convince them that this proves they have the potential to sing. Persist. Teach them to sing.

Close all eyes. Sing one note for them. Ask them to sing it back. If they sing instead a different note, sing THEIR note back to THEM. Let them hear that the notes are the same. Have them listen to their own sound. If they at first don’t sing one note, but instead “drift” up or down in pitch, like a siren, imitate what they are doing. You could call it a siren. Let them sense they can control the beginning, middle, and end of their sound.

Ask them to listen to your staying on one pitch, and teach them how to stay on one single pitch. If they say they can’t sing even one note, then sing TO them the pitches of their WORDS as they are SAYing them. Ask them to repeat what you sing. Some people will sing only at their speech level and think they cannot sing higher. Make siren sounds going as high as you can. Encourage them to imitate. Have everyone do it together.

Let them sing any note. Sing back that note. Let them sing it again, and you sing it back, again and again. Eyes closed. Play it on an instrument. Name it. Write it. Make the most of it. Give them a small task. Give one more. One at a time. Work with them until they get it. Assure them that their fluency in their native language, with their clear mastery of the complex and subtle tonal inflections of their language, proves that they DO have an “ear”, and CAN hear well enough to sing specific pitches. You’ll work with the children like this too. Parents will see how we work, in do-able bits. One point lesson, one new point at a time.

Explain to parents that they CAN and SHOULD SING the Suzuki pieces, because it helps them and it helps the children to hear, and to learn by ear, sing in their minds, and find their pieces. This sets the example, gives the model of how to learn, and validates it. And it gives parents the ability to know the pieces, and to help the children develop independence in their learning. It helps develop the “ear” of each person involved. It gets the music into the mind and body, so it can come out the hands.

Ask them, when ready, to sing daily a simple scale up: Do re mi fa sol la ti do. And the same scale down: Do ti la sol fa me re do. When that’s easy, ask also for broken chords, up and down, to be sung daily. Start with the 3-note major triad: Do mi sol mi do. When that’s easy, sing a harmonic MINOR scale: Do re ME fa sol LE ti do. Changing the vowel shows that the note differs from the major scale note; in the minor scale, the changed note is a half-step lower than its major scale counterpart. Natural minor could be sung thus: Do re ME fa sol LE TE do.

We’ll ask children to remember the model sounds and to reproduce the same sounds, sounds which include pitch, tone quality, volume, shape and length. “Practice this sound”. We’ll ask them to notice where the sounds come from on their instruments.

Later, when the children are trying to “sound out” new pieces, they can help themselves by singing the next notes. If the children want parents’ help, **parents can help by SINGING** the next note. The children and parents will already have the sounds of the pieces in their minds from all the pre-playing listening. They will learn to “pick out” new songs by finding on the instrument the same sounds they hear in their minds, the same sounds they hear on their recordings.

We will **encourage them** to figure out their new songs on their own, **“by ear”**. They’ll develop independence to learn and work out their new songs just by listening, with trial and error at the instrument. We will allow them to develop this ability just as we allow babies their own timing in learning to talk and walk. We HAVE to allow babies to learn to walk and talk at their own speed. We NEED TO allow children to figure out their music at THEIR own speed. (We won’t ruin children’s efforts toward discovery by SHOWING them the next note, which is ROTE teaching); (“rote” means “showing without knowing”).

We’ll help instead by SINGING the next note. Or playing it for them with their eyes closed. We’ll ask them to close eyes while we PLAY the next notes. They’ll match sounds instrument to instrument as well as matching instrumental sound to vocal sound. Thus, children can continue their EAR development. (We’ll not ruin their fun in sound discovery). We’ll let the EAR have the mind’s full attention (and not let the EYES steal it away).

Explain that we are developing the ear and memory with repeated listening to the same pieces, over and over, and that later, memorization will come more quickly, with less listening needed. This ability to memorize what we hear will grow with repeated listening. Clarify that **we are letting the children learn all the Suzuki pieces first by listening to them**, and that **Suzuki Method starts with ear training. This is learning “by ear”, which is different from learning by “rote”**; (“rote” means “showing without knowing”).

As children and parents **learn how to learn by listening**, they develop their **ability to notice more about what they hear**, and what they feel in music, a language of the heart. They experience living beat and living tone, singing tone. They follow melodies, and feel the effects of accompaniment. They absorb the musical meanings of everything they’re hearing: beginnings, endings, impulse, forward drive to important notes, building up, melting, various kinds of motion, waves of sound, swinging, rocking, speeding, repetition, change, resistance and gravity. They develop a sense of “the beat”, a LIVING beat, and the different feel (or swing) of each kind of beat grouping (meter), the feeling of flow, of bouncing, sailing, floating, flying, of upbeats, impetus, downbeats, the sense of different rhythms, sense of overall timing...

They develop natural phrasing, sensitivity to pitches, awareness of all intervals, awareness of steps, skips, leaps, landings, cascading, reverberation, qualities of chords, function and meaning of long notes, high notes, crescendos, decrescendos, high points, patterns, echoes, variants, spacings, harmonies, melodies, counterpoint, independent voices, polyphony, monody, accompaniment, and accompaniment styles, keys, modulation, transposition, accelerando, ritardando, activity, repose, searching, finding, urgency, relaxation, forms, textures, timbres, voicing, contrasts, articulations, touch, accents, varied repetition, exposition, development, recapitulation, pauses, silence, whole pieces, expectation, surprise, coaxing, cadence, deception, fulfillment, mood, character, and everything else in musical experience.

Their “feel” for music will become intuitive. They’ll feel mood in the music, vehemence, and regret, exuberance, exhilaration, and fun! Their playing will become musical and expressive from all this repeated listening. They’ll play “with feeling”, and ENJOY playing the music! They’ll play with heart. **Imagination** will be part of their music making. When they learn new pieces, the elements they’ve absorbed from the old well-known pieces will enliven the new pieces. They’ll memorize new pieces that they’ve never heard before, because the ability to memorize becomes strong. Because of their ease, familiarity, comfort, and FREEDOM with the instrument, the hands will find transposing on the instrument happens naturally, guided by the ear. Also, **improvisation** will come naturally, as long as its appearance is **appreciated, respected, and encouraged** (not squelched), just as we actually IMPROVISE when we TALK! Kids eventually will be able to play most anything they hear. What a great gift! It’s not an inborn gift; it’s an inborn **potential**, and it’s a **developed** gift.

Once the children “know” the pieces in their minds and can hum them, sing them, and can find them by ear on their instruments, we DO physically demonstrate HOW to play. We show the best natural technique from the beginning so we can use our bodies easily for musical expression through living tone.