

“Welcoming students into your studio, with friendly boundaries”

For CFMTA teacher chat, August 19, 2022, Laura Gray



FIRST IMPRESSIONS:

- Through personal websites, community signs, and/or professional social media pages, ensure that your advertising communicates the type of studio that you want to operate.
- Don't be caught off-guard when contacted by phone calls. Make a checklist of things that you would want to cover in a phone conversation, and have an email response on file that you personalize for each inquiry.

Once you have the initial communication and they have decided to register for lessons...what's next?

WELCOMING NEW STUDENTS:

- **Invite the student and parent to meet with you** outside of the planned first lesson, if your schedule allows. This provides a comfortable time for the new family to feel like they belong, and they develop confidence in their great choice in registering for lessons with you. If you cannot find a time to meet outside of scheduled lessons, using the first lesson, or portion of it, in this way should be considered a good use of time.
- Prior to the meeting you could:
 - a. Send any further documents for them to review in their own time; media agreement, studio calendar, and so on. (policy documents were probably shared during the initial communication)
 - b. Give clear directions to finding your studio entrance and where to park
 - c. Link them to your website and/or social media pages where they can learn more about you and your studio in their own time
 - d. Check with the parents about any special requirements, and prepare to try to make them comfortable. Eg.
 - i. Very shy students = keep your distance and create a calm environment, rather than bubbly, and recommend bringing a favourite stuffy. Use a puppet or toy/studio mascot to communicate with them
 - ii. Easily over-stimulated = avoid sensory overload = quiet, gentle lighting
 - iii. Very active students = have some fidget tools handy, pencil crayons & paper to draw, while we get to know each other
 - e. If you have pets around your studio, discuss this in advance
- During the meeting **take control**. From the moment they arrive, this is your chance to set the behaviour you desire every week.

- a. **Greet them** at the door. If you can, get down to the level of the child and speak to them directly:

"Hi, you must be Natalie. It's so nice to meet you. Who did you bring with you today?"

(this gives the child a chance to introduce mom or whoever, and you can welcome them too).

"Natalie, you can call me Miss Laura. When you come for your lesson, you don't have to ring the doorbell, I'll be expecting you, so come on in. I might have another student here, so please come in quietly and put your shoes right here on this grey mat."

This leads to...

- b. **Tour your studio space**, with parents and students, chatting casually about the routine of arriving for lessons. Include things that you wouldn't know when you go to a new place for the first time:

- i. Where to put your shoes & coats
- ii. Visit the washroom & garbage can, kleenex, and so on
- iii. Reminders about parking, and if drop off & pick up is the plan, review safety expectations and timing
- iv. What to bring to the first lesson, and what you will have for them at that time, and what to bring to every lesson after that
- v. In a friendly way...What NOT to bring to lessons:

"You won't need to bring anything else to your lessons, because I'll have new things for you to learn about here, and we'll be so busy making music and having fun that we won't need other toys or snacks."

- vi. Where to wait if they arrive before the lesson time
- vii. Any off-limits areas of your home or property. Be sure not to invoke any fear of your family or your spaces 😊
- viii. Where parents should sit while they wait.
- ix. If siblings are coming along, what are your expectations for that?

"What I'm trying to have is a space where the student is the centre of attention and able to focus & thrive, without distractions or competition for attention."

- x. Show students some of the areas/activities they will be using during lessons. Eg. rhythm instruments, games, challenge charts, and other manipulatives. Allow a reasonable time to explore, and take note of the student's interests, but remember *this is not a lesson!*
- xi. If there are areas of your studio that students are to be hands-off, say so, and explain why. Eg.

"We'll play games on the carpet right here, but I don't want you to touch my special things on top of the fireplace, and never touch the fireplace because it could be hot."

- c. **Prepare questions about the student and family**. These will inform your plan for the lessons, and allow students or parents to ask questions of you as well - become confident with the person who will be spending time with their child/teen.

- d. **Discuss your policies** in person - *much more effective than sending a document that you hope they read* - and have parents **sign any agreements** necessary, and **receive payment**, or set that up
- e. **Recommend practice strategies** and explain (in an age-appropriate way) the process of learning to play an instrument or sing
- f. **Make music together**, just a little bit to start the excitement: improvise, duets, hear something they have “learned” on their own, or even just play a little something for them
- g. **Be punctual** - be ready to start the meeting on time, and wrap it up within the expected time frame. Respect the parents’ time, and they’ll also learn to respect yours.
- h. If another student happens to be leaving or arriving while the family is there, **introduce them to each other**. Form a sense of community in your studio.

RETURNING STUDENTS:

- **Don’t assume it’s all the same.** Things can change a lot over a couple of months, so **before lessons resume**, use an email or google form (etc) to check in with parents about things like:
 - a. Special needs; eg. new diagnosis, allergies
 - b. Changes to the student’s responsibilities or routine; eg. a new school, new job.
 - c. Any changes to the home environment; eg. a new instrument, a change in the family structure (new baby, grandma moved in...)
 - d. Let them know of any major changes to your studio environment; eg. different parking, a new pet around the house
 - e. Ensure you have current, up-to-date contact information. (sometimes they forget to update the music teacher)
- **Get reacquainted with each other, and the space.** Students and parents easily forget expectations and routines, and they also forget boundaries. Your expectations may have changed too.

FOR PARENTS -

I require that parents at least “pop in” to the start of the first lesson to review things like:

- a. **Your policies** in person - *much more effective than sending a document that you hope they read* - and have parents **sign any agreements** necessary, and **receive payment**
- b. **Practice strategies** in an age-appropriate way. Take every opportunity you have for that!

“Emma, since you’ve learned so much, now you’re playing longer pieces, and working hard on your scales and triads, plus you’re older and able to focus for longer, I want you to aim to practice for a few extra minutes each day, compared to last year. You should read my specific practice instructions in the lesson assignment in your binder each day to help you improve.”

- c. **Introduce them** to students or parents who are leaving or arriving while they are there. Form a sense of community in your studio
- d. **What to bring to lessons**. A suggestion I’m going to try is having the student or parent add pages to the lesson binder, rather than handing them a complete book of tools and pages, and not having them be aware of what’s in there

FOR STUDENTS -

Give them time to explore, get comfortable, and share their summer news.
Share your news too. Build relationships! Then share your expectations for lessons using the following ideas:

- e. **Re-tour the studio space**: review entry process, visit the washroom, see if they can spot anything new since last time they were there, while chatting about important boundaries. Speak in the positive, rather than a list of “don’t do’s”:
“I’d like you to put your coat on the hook so that the next student doesn’t step on your things.”
- f. **What to bring to lessons**.
 - Let students add new pages to the lesson binder, talking about how much they have learned, and what they will be learning this year
 - Check out what books are in the bag, and present them with any new books, giving them time to explore the contents. Make it fun to get new music!
- g. **Practice and New Studio Incentives**

Think of what it’s like to be a student, or to be going into a new environment.
What would make you more confident and comfortable?