How kids can practice an instrument: a 15-minute plan

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A fifteen-minute daily practice plan for kids learning an instrument: warm up, play the hard bit slowly, speed it up with a free metronome, end with a favourite.

Fifteen focused minutes a day: two to warm up, six on the hardest two bars played slowly until they're right, four speeding them up with a metronome, three playing the piece through, and a favourite song to finish. That beats an hour of playing the easy parts. Peabody's free metronome runs on any phone, free through the end of 2026.

The plan

1. Warm up, 2 minutes. A scale, a few long notes, or a song you know well.
2. The hard bit, 6 minutes. Find the two bars that trip you up. Play them slowly, five times right in a row.
3. Speed it up, 4 minutes. Set the metronome slow. When it's easy, add a few beats a minute.
4. Play it through, 3 minutes. The whole piece, mistakes and all.
5. A favourite. Something you love, just for fun.

Why slow works

Playing a hard part fast and wrong teaches your fingers the mistake. Playing it slowly and right teaches the right way, and speed follows. A metronome makes "slowly" exact, and shows if you rush.

Using a metronome

Set the beats a minute, press Start and play along. The first beat of every bar clicks higher. Don't know the speed? Tap the beat four times and Peabody finds it. Tempo words on sheet music (andante, allegro) are shown beside the number.

For grown-ups

- Sit in for the first minute, then leave them to it.
- Ask "play me the bit you worked on" instead of "did you practise?"
- Praise the work: "that hard bit is much smoother."
- A small audience helps: a sibling, a grandparent on a call, a row of stuffed animals.

The Music guides have more, including how to start music at home with no instrument. And for the reader in the family, there's Peabody's library.

What to practise

New players do well with songs they already know. The ten easy songs to learn first go from three notes (Hot Cross Buns) to a whole alphabet song, each with a song sheet in any key, and the Chord Finder shows any chord on piano, ukulele or guitar.

Keep a practice notebook

A small notebook on the music stand helps a child see progress. Each day, three lines:

- What I worked on: "bars 9 and 10 of Ode to Joy".
- The metronome speed: "started at 60, ended at 72".
- One thing that got better: "the jump to the high note".

After a few weeks, the speeds climbing up the page are proof the practice works. Teachers find the notes useful too.

When practice feels stuck

Every learner hits a patch where nothing seems to improve. That's normal. Try going slower than feels necessary, practising the hard bit with the hands separately (on piano), or learning the tricky passage backwards: the last two notes first, then the last four. And take a day off now and then; sometimes a passage that was stuck on Monday is suddenly fine on Wednesday.

Questions grown-ups ask

How long should a young child practise?

Short and regular is the key. Ten to fifteen minutes a day suits most beginners; a teacher can say what fits your child.

What if they don't want to practise?

Make the last few minutes something they choose, and keep the time short. A song they love to play pulls them back more than a timer.

Does the metronome need the internet once it's open?

No. The click is made in the browser, and nothing is saved or sent.

Should my child practise every day?

Most teachers suggest little and often, five or six days a week. A day off is fine; a week off makes the next practice harder.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/how-to-practice-an-instrument-kids