



Edmonton  
**SUZUKI**  
Piano School

**Parent Handbook**

2019

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## ***The Suzuki Approach***

Dr. Shinichi Suzuki (1898 – 1998), a Japanese violinist and teacher, observed and studied how children learn throughout his life. Encouraged by their ability to assimilate the mother tongue, he saw great opportunity to enrich children’s lives through music. His primary goal was not only to teach young people how to play musical instruments. Rather, he championed the unique contribution music can make in the total learning process.

The Suzuki approach deals with much more than just teaching a child how to play an instrument. It seeks to develop the whole child, to help unfold his or her 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 find the joy that comes through music-making. Through the Suzuki growing process, children thrive in a total environment of support. Suzuki students develop confidence and self-esteem, determination to try different things, self-discipline and concentration. As well, they acquire a lasting enjoyment of music and the sensitivity and skill for making music.

“The Suzuki approach to teaching very young children, with its belief in their great potential and its concern for them as sensitive, compassionate, and thoughtful as well as accomplished human beings, has much to give the world of education at large.” This quote from Susan Grilli’s book, *Preschool in the Suzuki Spirit*, underlines her belief in the wonderful things that children can and will accomplish from a very early age, when they are in the supportive learning environment advocated by Shinichi Suzuki.

## ***Introduction***

### **Why a handbook?**

This handbook has been prepared by Edmonton Suzuki Piano School (ESPS) to present an outline of the program to our Suzuki families. We hope that as you read the following pages, you will share our feelings of excitement and enthusiasm for the program offered.

### **So you want to be a Suzuki Parent?**

Congratulations! Dr. Shinichi Suzuki believes that the fate of our children lies in the hands of parents. What a wonderful idea that, as parents, you wish to enjoy and understand your relationship with your child better through the world of music. The Suzuki approach is more than just music lessons. It explores areas of home practice, and how to encourage continuous enthusiastic support for the progress of learning to play an instrument. The Suzuki approach relies strongly on the cooperative relationship of teacher, parent and child in a pleasant, yet disciplined environment. It is a philosophy, a technique, and a program of parent education.

The parent's role involves the following:

- Participating in an orientation program introducing the basic ideas of the Suzuki philosophy and method.
- Attending each lesson with the student, taking notes, and practicing with the student at home on a daily basis.
- Playing the recordings (CDs) frequently at home each day.
- Helping create not only a musical environment for the child, but also a total environment of affection, support, encouragement and understanding.
- Participating in special events like the annual Fall Institute and Spring Festival.
- Serve as a volunteer when necessary to help enhance the success of ESPS and its programming.

Finally, the most important part of being a Suzuki family is the willingness and commitment to devote regular time to your child and to work closely with the teacher, and other parents, in building a strong relationship for the sake of the child's growth and development.

## ***Edmonton Suzuki Piano School – Structure and Objectives***

Edmonton Suzuki Piano School is a parent-teacher organization established to provide piano instruction in the Suzuki approach, and is registered with the Alberta Societies Branch. Because parental involvement is critical in the Suzuki program, the parents are organized to aid the teachers in efficiently achieving their purpose. Upon registration with Edmonton Suzuki Piano School, parents become participating members of the society.

It is the responsibility of parents to support the programs, attend the two general meetings of the Society (held in the fall and spring) and volunteer in some capacity as needed. Volunteering for a board position or committee work is encouraged and much appreciated.

The ESPS Board of Directors consists of a group of volunteer parents who hold the positions of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Members-at-large also serve on the Board of Directors. By providing direction to the Administrator, the Board of Directors manage the affairs of the school. There is also a Teacher Representative, who attends each Board meeting and provides input from the teachers.

To communicate with the Administrator, or with members of the Board of Directors:

*Phone* 780.488.0548

*Fax* 780.488.0538

*Email* office@edmontonsuzukipiano.ca

*Mail* ESPS

5820 168 Avenue

Edmonton, AB. T5Y 0K6

The objectives of the Society are as follows:

- To promote and encourage an overall appreciation of music for all participating members;
- To develop and explore a better understanding of the Suzuki philosophy of music education;
- To communicate to the general public the aims and objectives of the organization;
- To motivate and stimulate growth in the musical skills of children registered in the Edmonton Suzuki Piano School program;
- To encourage and provide varied parent education opportunities;
- To support teacher training programs.

## ***The Program at Edmonton Suzuki Piano School***

### **Lessons**

#### *Individual Lessons*

Generally, weekly individual lessons are offered with the teacher of your choice. Your teacher will determine the appropriate duration of the lesson. Teachers provide students 37 lessons during the course of the school term. Observation of other children's lessons is recommended to enhance the learning experience.

#### *Group Lessons*

Group lessons are an important component of the Suzuki program. Attending group lessons is an integral part of the ESPS program and it enhances the learning experiences of any instrument significantly. Failure to attend group classes regularly not only minimizes the optimal learning environment of the student, but it also negatively impacts the group dynamic, team spirit, performance level and the teacher.



### **Performance**

Suzuki philosophy encourages regular performance participation. Regular recitals will include larger formal gatherings. Additionally, performance opportunities could include more informal concerts that parents organize at home or piano parties organized by several parents.

Recitals benefit both performer and listener. A performer is given the opportunity to play his/her best in front of an attentive audience and to practise stage presence. Students in the audience have a chance to hear a variety of music played well and to practice good audience behaviour. The recital length is planned so that families will enjoy the entire program. Camera flashes and noises are distracting to a performer, and parents are asked not to use flash cameras during a performance.

#### *Formal Recitals*



ESPS holds formal recitals twice a year (usually February and June) for all students. The piece to be performed is decided by the teacher and student together and is never the piece most recently studied. Rather, the performance piece is one that has been perfected by frequent repetitions so that it has been thoroughly mastered. This helps to ensure that the student is comfortable with their piece and has a successful performance.

#### *Graduation Recitals*

Graduation recitals are held several times a year. Once a teacher determines that a volume has been completed, the student will perform three polished pieces from that volume at the graduation



recital. A plaque and certificate are presented to each of the graduating students at the end of the recital.

## **Parent Education**

Because the Suzuki approach relies so strongly on the role of the parents, it is important for the parents to commit themselves to learning all they can, and for teachers to assist the parents in gaining confidence in their important role as home helper.

The Edmonton Suzuki Piano School provides opportunities for parent education, supplementing the ongoing learning that parents experience through the weekly lessons with their children.

When your family begins individual lessons, parents must attend the Parent Orientation Class. This is an introduction to the philosophy and an exploration of the parent's role and effectiveness as a Suzuki parent. This 3-hour workshop is generally offered twice a year, in May and October. Your teacher will inform you of the nearest date when you register.

Each year, the Fall Workshop features a parent education component. It is a motivational and informative session that is an opportunity for new parents to become better oriented to the program and for returning parents to refuel for the coming term.

Additionally, ESPS regularly collaborates with other Edmonton Suzuki groups to offer further parent education sessions. Parents will be informed of other parent education events throughout the year.

## **Special Events**

### *Fall Workshop*

This three-day event is held each fall. The Friday session is a full day of professional development for ESPS teachers. ESPS believes in providing a variety of training opportunities for teachers. Saturday and Sunday are filled with excitement as master teachers share their expertise with our students and parents. The master teachers are highly qualified and come to us from throughout North America.

Each student is scheduled for one master class and one enrichment activity. Because much can be learned from observation, we encourage everyone to take in as much as possible during the weekend.

Special sessions for parents are always interesting, usually entertaining, and give parents a renewed sense of commitment and a clearer understanding of the Suzuki philosophy.

### *Spring Festival*

The Spring Festival gives students an opportunity to perform and receive a constructive adjudication of their performance. This adjudication is conducted by a guest teacher, invited by ESPS. Each student receives a copy of the adjudication and a certificate of performance. The spirit of the festival is non-competitive and therefore no marks are awarded.

### *Summer Institutes*

Every summer, there are wonderful opportunities to attend summer workshops. These summer music camps give students the chance to receive valuable music education with an international Suzuki specialist, renew musical acquaintances and start the year feeling fresh and enthusiastic. A listing of Institutes is available each spring on the Suzuki Association of the Americas website.

### **Teacher Training**

ESPS believes in providing a variety of professional development opportunities for teachers. Teacher training courses and regular professional workshops are your teacher's way of staying in touch with the latest developments in both the Suzuki world and the best possible teaching techniques. It is to your advantage to study with teachers who continually search for the best ways to teach. Teachers with ESPS must be involved with ongoing training with qualified teacher trainers.



### **Publications**

#### *Website*

ESPS maintains a website at [edmontonsuzukipiano.ca](http://edmontonsuzukipiano.ca). The site contains information about the program at ESPS, a calendar of upcoming events, newsletters, registration information both for the program and special events, a listing of items available in the lending library, and links to other websites.

#### *Newsletter*

Edmonton Suzuki Piano School prints its newsletter, *Twinkling the Ivories*, about five times each year. It provides families with news of upcoming events and other information. Articles of interest and educational value are also printed. These newsletters are available in teachers' studios, online at [edmontonsuzukipiano.ca](http://edmontonsuzukipiano.ca) and via email updates from ESPS.

Each family should take a newsletter, read it, write down important dates, and assume responsibility for the information within.

#### *Social Media*

Our Facebook page (@edmontonsuzukipiano) provides regular updates and reminders about upcoming events.

## **Fund-Raising**

Edmonton Suzuki Piano School relies on a casino as its sole fundraiser. It takes place about every two years. ESPS is committed to providing volunteer staffing for two days, on the dates assigned by the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission. The two-day casino requires the efforts of about 45 volunteers in order to be successful.

### ***Procedures at Edmonton Suzuki Piano School***

#### **Registration Fee**

Each family is required to pay an annual registration fee to Edmonton Suzuki Piano School. This fee helps fund the costs associated with special events, facility rentals, repertoire, equipment maintenance, teacher training, and operational expenses. This amount is non-refundable. At registration, each family will complete registration forms that will include basic contact information and preferences for group lessons and volunteer activities.

#### **Studio Policies**

##### *Individual Lessons*

Weekly lessons are attended by the child and parent (the one who practices with the child).

##### *Scheduling*

There are 37 lessons in the teaching year (September – June). Generally, lessons begin around Labour Day. Teachers do not offer lessons over the Christmas and March breaks. It is preferable that lessons be scheduled on school days whenever possible.

##### *Missing Individual Lessons*

The lesson times agreed upon by the teacher, parent and child is a mutual commitment. THERE WILL BE NO MAKE-UP LESSONS FOR LESSONS MISSED BY A FAMILY. A parent may arrange with another parent to exchange lesson times, but must notify the teacher of the exchange. In the event that the teacher cancels a lesson, the lesson will be made up at a time that is convenient to the teacher, parent and student, or the teacher will refund the fee for the cancelled lesson.

##### *Length of Individual Lessons*

Lesson times vary, depending on the child's concentration and levels of study.

##### *Tuition Fee*

The annual tuition fee funds 37 individual lessons. There are several payment options for the tuition fee. Parents can pay tuition fees in 10 installments on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of each month, in three installments or in one lump sum by cheque or pre-authorized debit. Parents must make payment arrangements at the time of registration.

### *Withdrawal from ESPS Classes*

Parents wishing to withdraw a child from the ESPS program should notify their teacher and the ESPS Administrator at least one month in advance, so that another student on the waiting list can be prepared to begin lessons. In lieu of proper notice, one month's tuition will also be due. Any unused post-dated tuition cheques will be returned to the parent.

### *Conservatory Exams*

As Suzuki teachers, we feel that the Suzuki repertoire should be taught as an uninterrupted unit. Preparation for the Grade 8 exam may begin at the beginning of Book 7, at the teacher's discretion.

### *Communication with Teachers*

Parents with brief technical questions regarding an individual piece, practicing, or maintenance of the instrument can pose them at a lesson. Parents with broader questions or concerns should email or telephone during non-teaching hours to discuss the problem. Teachers would prefer not to discuss broader issues in front of the student.

Edmonton Suzuki Piano School recognizes that there comes a time, for a variety of reasons, when a parent may wish to change teachers. Should you find yourself in the position where you are contemplating such a change, certain guidelines to help the process work more smoothly for all concerned have been formulated:

- If a problem arises, the parent must communicate with the teacher directly. Hopefully, this will enable communication and resolution of the problem.
- If the problem is not resolved, parents should contact the Administrator to discuss the issue.
- If it is determined by the Administrator that resolution is not possible, the Administrator will provide the parent with a list of teachers available to accept new students. The parent will provide the original teacher with one month's notice before transferring.

If possible, it is recommended that changes be made at the end of the school year. If parents follow these guidelines, it is hoped that all parties will feel comfortable and fairly treated.

### *Equipment*

Providing the proper physical environment is part of the parent's duty. It is essential to have an acoustic piano, in good condition and regularly tuned, an adjustable bench or chair and an appropriate footstool, and a CD player. You will also need to have CDs of the current Suzuki repertoire and the matching piano music scores. It is highly recommended that parents make copies of their CDs, as they are easily damaged or misplaced. *Only one copy of the CD is provided to the family by ESPS.* Replacement CDs are expensive and must be purchased by families. The ESPS website features links for resources such as adjustable benches and footstools. It is important to work with your teacher in order to determine optimal positioning and posture for your child at your own piano.

## ***Resources Available to ESPS Families***

### *Website*

ESPS maintains a website at [edmontonsuzukipiano.ca](http://edmontonsuzukipiano.ca). The site contains information about the program at ESPS, a calendar of upcoming events, newsletters, registration information for the program, classifieds, a resources section for parents and teachers and links to other websites.

### *Newsletter*

Edmonton Suzuki Piano School prints its newsletter, *Twinkling the Ivories*, about five times each year. It provides families with news of upcoming events and other information.

### *Social Media*

Our Facebook and Instagram (@edmontonsuzukipiano) pages provide regular updates and reminders about upcoming events.

### *Lending Library*

Maintaining a good reference library is encouraged. The following are recommended reading and available through the ESPS lending library:

*Talent is Overrated* by Geoff Colvin

*The Talent Code* by Daniel Coyle

*Intelligent Music Teaching* by Robert Duke

*Mindset* by Carol Dweck

*The Piano Book* by Larry Fine

*Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell

*The Practice Revolution* by Philip Johnson

*Nurtured by Love* by Shinichi Suzuki

*Ability Development from Age Zero* by Shinichi Suzuki

*Where Love is Deep* by Shinichi Suzuki

*To Learn with Love* by William and Constance Starr

*Thoughts on the Suzuki Piano School* by Haruko Kataoka

*My Thoughts on Piano Technique* by Haruko Kataoka

*Helping Parents Practice: Ideas for Making it Easier* by Edmund Sprunger

*Music Mind Games* by Michiko Yurko

## **Suzuki Association of the Americas (SAA)**

The SAA is a professional organization for parents, students and teachers. Their publication, the American Suzuki Journal, includes articles by teachers and parents, advertisements of new Suzuki materials, a membership directory and an annual directory of Institutes. It is recommended that you enrol in the SAA and become part of the Suzuki movement. More information is available at their website: [suzukiassociation.org](http://suzukiassociation.org)