

Guitar Lessons for Young Children

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Introduction

I am comfortable teaching guitar to children from 6 and up. For younger children with an interest in music, ukelele, piano or electronic keyboard (which is easier on the fingers) are all choices worth exploring. Teaching the basics of rhythm can also be fun for young children – keeping time with a metronome is a teachable, entertaining, and life-long skill. Another recommendation for children younger than 6 is that the lesson be shorter – maybe 15 or 20 minutes rather than a half hour or longer.

Parental support promotes success at any age. With this said, direct parental involvement can be helpful in the first lesson, or few – until the student has developed a comfortable rapport with the teacher. Once a good comfort level is achieved, parents should not attend the lessons. In my experience, parental attendance creates a distraction. The student becomes more concerned with the parent’s approval rather than the teacher’s instruction. This is counter-productive.

What You Need

For young children (6 to 12 or so) I use and recommend the Hal Leonard Guitar Method Series. The 3 book series will teach the student at a reasonable pace. By the time the student finishes the series, s/he will have a good understanding of reading music along with exposure to multiple musical styles and guitar techniques. Most students average a book a year or so.

IMPORTANT – Be sure to get the edition that includes audio access so the student can listen to what s/he is learning and practice along with it. Recently, Hal Leonard has introduced an edition that comes with video as well. In my opinion, they are not worth the extra price. Many of the videos are not related directly to the lessons in book. Regardless, having access to online audio is essential.



For the younger ages and/or smaller children it is critical that they have a half size “student” guitar with nylon strings. Yamaha makes a good one that is available at Sweetwater (a leading musical online site) – model CGS202A (pictured above). Even better - you may be able to find

one, or an equivalent at a local music store. Open Chord in Knoxville - www.openchordmusicshop.com stocks good student models. Flint Meryl Music in Fountain City - www.flintmerylmusic.com not only stocks good student models but offers a 'rent-to-own' program for students as well.

(Full disclosure – I currently teach at both locations).

I highly recommend local stores as they are typically more concerned with selling you what you need and taking the time to answer all your questions. In addition, they are your neighbor.

Beware of bigger stores such as Guitar Center – they will try to sell you what is good for them, not what is good for you, the customer. That is usually their business model. Do not consider guitars at Wal Mart, Target and the like. They are not serious instruments.

If the child is a little older or larger, a $\frac{3}{4}$ size student guitar with nylon strings may be appropriate. The general rule of thumb for determining size is that the student can reach the first three frets comfortably.

Regardless of size, steel strings are not recommended for young children. The process of developing callouses can be painful and discouraging.

A young child will also need a foot stool to lift the leg enough that the guitar does not slip towards the floor. This is an example of a professional adjustable footstool but anything that achieves the same result will do.



Over the last twenty years I have taught many young children – 6 and up. Some take to it, some don't. My personal opinion is that it is good to expose children to many things and let them decide what is best for them, what they wish to gravitate towards.

I always ask new students of all ages "Why do you want to learn guitar". The best answer I ever got was from a young child - "because it sounds good".

So, in closing A student size guitar, an instructor, parental support, and a Hal Leonard Method book is what the young student needs to get started.