

# Transcript: The Relationship Conversation for Parents



I've been immersed in music education for decades – as a developer of methodologies, as a teacher, as a coach to teachers as well as a trainer of teacher trainers. One of things that I've come to see is that there's a huge number of adults who regret not having had music lessons when they were young. There are also vast numbers of adults who had music lessons but now regret the fact that they quit when they were young. Both groups of people make comments like, "music just wasn't my thing" or "I'm not musical" or "I wasn't motivated" or "I didn't have the discipline or talent for it." Understandably, now as adults and parents, they want their own children to have lessons and they genuinely hope that their children will stick at it and keep playing music throughout their lives. With that being said, one of the most common concerns that I consistently hear from these parents, in fact nearly all parents who have children in music lessons, is the difficulty they have supporting their children in sticking with their music lessons. And when people talk about this issue – both parents and teachers alike – most still continue to refer to their children and use language like "he lacks motivation" or "she doesn't have the skill" or "she doesn't have the talent or ability" or "he lacks commitment" etc.

In my opinion, the entire subject of children having music lessons and their being able to 'stick with it', needs to be viewed from a completely different perspective and that's what I'd like to address here.

There's a very important conversation that we need to have. It's what I call 'The Relationship Conversation.' Understanding what this conversation is about, and having it be a constant presence throughout the learning experience is critical to a child's, or for that matter anybody's, ability to become musically self-expressed. And when I listen to the challenges and problems that parents face when it comes to their children's success with music lessons, I can almost always see that their concerns are either a function of there being an inadequate presence of The Relationship Conversation, or mostly, unfortunately, being totally unaware of the conversation and it being absent altogether. Understanding all of the layers to The Relationship Conversation – learning how to have the conversation with children, as well as learning how to manage it and keep it alive – is something that takes time, patience, discipline, constant practice and a great deal of compassion.

So the purpose of this conversation is to develop an awareness of, and a far more comprehensive understanding of what The Relationship Conversation is all about.



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## Some Background

Firstly, in the culture of music education, we've inherited certain conditions. One of these conditions is that, for the most part, music lessons have emerged as a 'child-centric' activity, where the responsibility for mostly everything about learning music – being focused at the lesson, understanding the content and practicing throughout the week – rests in the hands of the child. In essence, most commonly, both teachers and parents hold the child responsible for their learning and their progress. The often unspoken, underlying expectation is that during the lesson the child will not only take in all the information that they need, but that they'll also leave the lesson inspired, disciplined, committed to getting themselves to their instrument, wanting to practice every day, and enjoying it all – and hopefully with the end result being that the child loves the process and that they become an accomplished and self-expressed musician. That's the basic expectation. And if that doesn't happen then the parent (or unfortunately oftentimes even the teacher) commonly says, and actually believes a version of, "well, music wasn't for them" or, "they just weren't talented" or, "they just don't have what it takes," or some other similar, completely flawed explanation.

This extremely unfortunate scenario completely fails to recognize some fundamental and critically important truths. And it's essential that we talk about these, step back and take a look at the bigger picture.

Simply Music's fundamental premise is that everyone, without exception, is profoundly musical. Whether we realize it or not, our ability to walk and talk demonstrates deep mastery over highly complex rhythmical and musical concepts. The stories that we tell ourselves, like "I'm not musical," or "learning music is hard" or "it takes a special talent or ability" etc., are just that – they're stories that we've made up to explain and justify why so many children (and adults) fail at music lessons.

In reality, the problem has nothing to do with our musicality or talent or ability. All human beings are deeply and naturally and profoundly musical. And if that's true, then in order to bring musical self-expression into every person's life, we have to change our approach to music education. We have to change the way we think about it. We have to change the unspoken, unrealistic expectations that I described earlier – where the child is held entirely responsible for their entire experience. These underlying assumptions almost always fail to adequately address the role of the one person who is the key to a child's success in any ongoing endeavor – the parent.

Obviously, I'm not talking about the rare exceptions, but in reality it's simply a complete fallacy that a music teacher, in just a 30 or 60 minute lesson once a week, can instill in the child the inspiration and the discipline to consistently follow all of the instructions; to want to practice; to willingly take themselves to their instrument every day; to be energized and consistently enthusiastic throughout the remaining 6 days and 23 hours of that week until the next lesson. Nor does a child possess a deep enough reservoir of experience, maturity, passion or commitment to bear that responsibility for any meaningful length of time.



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The child might be enthusiastic for a few days, maybe a few weeks or even a few months, but truly gaining the ability to have music as a lifelong companion takes longer than that. It takes years, oftentimes many years. So the responsibility to support and encourage the child over the course of the week, and over the months and over the years, must rest in the hands of the parent – just as it does with all of the other areas of the child's life that the parent considers a priority.

In order to bring musical self-expression into a child's life, everyone involved – the teacher, the student and the parent – must be very, very clear about what their specific role and responsibility is. Everybody involved also needs to be very clear about their own relationship to the learning process. We have to clearly distinguish everybody's individual role, as well the synergy, the sum total of all three roles in the entire process.

For the most part, this aspect of the learning process – the respective roles and responsibilities – is profoundly overlooked and subsequently neglected. And leaving it so poorly addressed gives rise to all sorts of problems. This entire domain of personal, individual and collective responsibility has been collapsed and has simply disappeared into a vague sense of music lessons as a whole.

We need to newly re-examine the entire educational scenario, and develop a far more clear, more focused picture of what's actually going to occur throughout the learning process. And learning how to do this, how to talk about the complete process, and how to manage it and keep it alive, is what I call The Relationship Conversation.

## **Distinguishing the Two Domains – Method and Relationship**

So let's dig into this a little more. Before we go further into individual responsibilities, we need to make an important distinction that's often missed. There are two completely different domains that we have to address separately. One of the domains I call 'The Method,' meaning, everything about the actual process of attending the lesson, the musical instruction that takes place in the lesson, the strategies the teacher presents, the songs students are learning, managing the repertoire of pieces – all of the components of the actual music instruction being delivered, including the practice sessions at home during the week and using whatever materials are a part of that process. All of that, for the purpose of this conversation, I'm going to call The Method.

Separate from The Method is what I'll call 'The Relationship,' that is, the student's, the teacher's and the parent's individual and collective role and responsibility, as well as each person's relationship to the entire learning process.

Now, unless everybody's very clear about each part that they play, and the fact that we're dealing with two entirely separate domains (The Method and The Relationship), then I can promise you that you will run headfirst into all of the typical problems that have plagued music lessons for generations.



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## Our Goals: Establishing a Background

With that being said, and before we can get into a deeper understanding of The Relationship Conversation, we need to establish a foundation, an understanding of what our intention is in the first place. We need to look at our basic goals.

As an organization, Simply Music's overall focus is on causing breakthroughs in creativity for humanity. Within that larger framework, the Simply Music Piano program has four declared goals. Our first goal is that students experience music, and experience their musicality, as a natural self-expression. Our second goal is that students have a huge repertoire, covering an array of musical styles and genres – we want our students to be able to sit down anywhere, at anytime and just play lots of music. Our third declared goal is that students develop the ability to self-generate, meaning, that they have the ability to progress on their own – they can go online, purchase some sheet music, figure it out, work their way through the piece, learn how to play the piece, and then have the skills and the tools that they need to be able to lay the piece out on the instrument and no longer need to rely on the music notation. In other words, they just have the song with them, it's in their mind, it's in their heart and their hands, and they can take it with them wherever they go. Our fourth declared goal is that students have a highly positive, self-affirming experience throughout the process, that students are left being accomplished and feeling good about themselves.

Having said that, within Simply Music, there's one overriding goal that umbrellas these four declared goals. It's vital that everyone involved in the learning process – teacher, parent and student – understand and are aligned with this overriding goal, that goal being to maximize the likelihood of students acquiring and retaining music as a lifelong companion.

In my opinion, this specific, overriding goal is far more important than a goal that focuses on the standard of musicianship students achieve. For me, whether a student emerges as a great player, a good player or an average player, isn't nearly as important as a student developing themselves to a stage where they can have music as a companion for the rest of their lives. So if we can produce students, regardless of their age, who can just sit down and really enjoy playing some contemporary, some blues, some classical, some accompaniment pieces, they can compose and improvise, they have a foundation of reading and theory, they have the ability to learn new pieces, and they have a repertoire of music that they love to play, and most importantly, they acquire the playing of music as a companion in their life, and they retain that for the rest of their lives, then we've contributed something truly extraordinary.

So let's look at this overriding goal of students acquiring and retaining music as a lifelong companion, and let's compare that to a different goal where a parent wants their child to be a brilliant musician. The fact is, going into the learning process, we have no idea what standard of musician we're likely to produce.



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Let me just draw a quick analogy. Imagine a parent taking their child to school for the first time, and the child hasn't learned how to read and write yet, and the parent says to the teacher, "I'd like my child to be a brilliant novelist." Well, seriously, we have no way of predicting whether that's going to happen or not. We know that we want the child to learn how to read and write, but whether they become a novelist, or a journalist, or whether they write technical manuals, or movie reviews, whether they write letters, or whether they just write for the purpose of day-to-day functionality – shopping lists, to-do lists, job applications, filling out forms, or writing birthday cards – who knows how a child's individual capacity to write will express itself and what role it'll play in their life? We simply don't know that.

Having said that, I think we could all agree that we want to make sure that we've equipped the child with the ability to read and write, because it's a useful and essential tool that they're going to want to have throughout their life.

Similarly, this notion of a parent bringing their child to music lessons with the underlying expectation that their child's going to achieve a particular standard of excellence – that's really premature and it's very inappropriate. And in fact, it stops us from really getting to the heart of the matter. In my opinion, the heart of the matter is the overriding goal – that we maximize the likelihood of the student acquiring and retaining the playing of music as a lifelong companion.

And in order to be successful with regard to that, everyone involved – teacher, parent and student – must be aligned with the overriding goal. And it's critical that teachers, in whatever words they use, be speaking directly with parents and saying something along the lines of: "What we're really doing here is our best attempt to equip your child with the ability to play music for the rest of their life. Now, where they take that, it's too early to say. We don't know what they're going to do with that. Whether they end up being a composer, or an improviser, whether they play in a band, whether they end up becoming a professional musician, or just play at home for themselves, or whatever the case may be we really have no idea yet how music will live in their life. But that it lives in their life, and that we do our best to make sure that they can have it as a friend for life – there is no more important goal."

And whether you're a student, a parent or a teacher, I believe it's essential that you wholeheartedly embrace this goal. Because at this point in time, this goal is far from being the norm, and yet it's absolutely achievable, and, if it can be achieved, then something truly extraordinary has been accomplished.

## Long-Term Relationships

So, with that as a background, if we're aligned and clear about the overriding goal, then now what we also need is to spend time looking at what our respective roles are. And what I mean by that is: What's your role as a teacher? What's your role as parent? What's your role as a student?



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As I said earlier, the reality we've inherited is that roles and responsibilities are rarely, if ever, clearly defined, clearly stated or clearly managed. Any wonder we're left with so few adults in the world who are musically self-expressed. Students can only achieve the goal of retaining music as a lifelong companion if all the parties understand and are committed to their roles. It's absolutely not just the The Method that needs to be addressed; it's all the surrounding issues that generally haven't been thought through, and haven't been addressed – in particular, the entire domain of The Relationship.

So if you as the parent truly agree with the overriding goal, if you can take responsibility for that goal, if you can say and believe for yourself, "You know what, this is what I want for my child, I do want them to have music in their life for the rest of their life, because that, in and of itself, is a great thing," then that commitment contains a particular truth. The simple truth that's being acknowledged is that we're asking the child to enter into, and maintain, a long-term relationship. If you, as a parent, truly want your child to have music in their life, for the rest of their life, then you must acknowledge that you're asking your child to enter into a long-term relationship with music.

And when you acknowledge that, the bottom line is that we've now stepped into an entirely new realm. What we now need is to understand the nature, characteristics and idiosyncrasies of long-term relationships. It's critical, absolutely critical, that you and your child understand this. And you, as the parent, must develop tools for helping your child navigate this long-term relationship. This is likely your child's first experience navigating a long-term relationship. And in order to support your child in this, you'll need to develop tools and language for thinking about and talking about long-term relationships. These tools, this ongoing conversation, is what I call The Relationship Conversation.

## **The Six Components of All Long-Term Relationships**

So, let's spend some time understanding the nature of long-term relationships. And here's the great thing about that: long-term relationships are extraordinarily simple to understand.

They're simple to understand because all long-term relationships have six fundamental components. I'm going to repeat that: there are only six components to all long-term relationships! And all long-term relationships have the same six components. Those six components fall into two categories. One category relates to 'quality', and the other category relates to 'quantity'.

In the area of quality, and I'm talking conceptually here, there are three components. Let's simply call them peaks, plateaus and valleys – peaks being the 'good' or the 'easier' times, plateaus being the 'just ok' times, and valleys being the 'not so good' or 'harder' times.





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In the area of quantity, I'm referring to duration over time. Here, there are also three components: short periods of time, medium periods of time, or long periods of time.

So, there we have it. There's every long-term relationship in a nutshell – three quality components: peaks, plateaus, and valleys; and three quantity components: short, medium and long periods of time.

What it means is this: all long-term relationships will, over time, be a combination of those six ingredients. There will always be one quality component, and one quantity component going on at any point in time. Just as an analogy, we can liken it to a graph of the stock market over a hundred years, or the value of real-estate, or the value of gold. If we looked at that graph, we'd see that during one phase the value is going up, and then in the next phase it's going down, and then it plateaus for a while, and then it shoots way up, and then it crashes way down, and then it plateaus again and then it starts to improve, and then it plateaus again, and then improves a little more, then it heads down etc., etc. I'm sure all of you can picture that graph. That is the Long-Term Relationship graph, and every long-term relationship looks the same. And for any of us that have been in any long-term relationship, or any of us who knows anyone who's ever been in a long-term relationship, we know exactly what that long-term relationship has looked like. It's been a combination of peaks, plateaus and valleys, with each one lasting for a short or medium or long period of time.

It's absolutely crucial here to understand that what we're asking a child to do, is enter into a long-term relationship with learning and playing music. Without exception, regardless of whatever else happens, the one thing that I can absolutely guarantee is that your child's experience is going to be a combination of peaks, plateaus and valleys, over short, medium or long periods of time. We have to get very, very clear about the reality of this. Otherwise, when problems arise, they'll be attributed to the wrong place, the wrong reason, the wrong person, in the wrong way, at the wrong time.

There's a common mistake that students, parents and even teachers unknowingly make. Ironically, it happens because we can confidently say that our method, the Simply Music Piano method is a breakthrough. It's important to notice that I'm saying the 'method' is a breakthrough. I'm so appreciative of the fact that I know we're presenting a way of learning that, by design, offers such a natural learning experience, where students immediately experience their musicianship, and build a huge repertoire, one that gives them the opportunity to self-generate, and to have a really positive and self-affirming experience throughout this process. I'm so thankful that we're dealing with a 'method' that delivers on its promise.

However, the mistake people often unknowingly make is that they think that because the 'method' is a breakthrough, that this also applies to the 'relationship'. It simply does not! We fall into the illusion that, with this fantastic method, music lessons will be fun and easy all the time (or mostly all of the time). But you're going to be in big trouble if you think that's the case. Because here's the only truth about long-term relationships: whatever you're experiencing now is temporary. Temporary doesn't necessarily mean brief, it just means the experience isn't permanent – it just means it will change.



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So, the student begins lessons, and they start playing these great-sounding songs, and they're loving it, and they're excited, and it's all new, and they just can't stop playing. All of a sudden their family and friends are saying, "Wow, this is incredible!" Parents, you're thrilled and proud. Your child is getting all this praise, and they feel great, and they're loving the whole process, and everybody's thinking, "Wow, this is what it's like!"

And then – as is the case with all long-term relationships, without exception – for whatever reason (and the reasons are irrelevant), the student starts heading into a valley. Music lessons begin to feel more difficult or less fun, and now your child wants to play with their friends rather than practice, they're not as excited about coming to lessons etc. When that happens, and it will, if you haven't separated the 'Method' from the 'Relationship', you and your child will think "something's wrong". And then you might try to attribute the 'problem' to something and start blaming the method, or the teacher, or your child, or yourself. If you aren't clear about, and haven't been talking to your child about peaks and plateaus and valleys, that last for short or medium or long periods of time, then you just won't recognize what's really happening. You and your child won't be adequately prepared to handle the situation. If The Relationship Conversation hasn't been a part of the conversation all along, and you're not perfectly clear about the fact that this will happen, then both you and your child are almost certainly going to think something like, "I thought was going to be fun. It was fun in the beginning. And now it's not as much fun, or not fun at all. Something must be wrong."

In actual fact, the paradox is that when this happens, something is tremendously right! That's exactly what's supposed to happen in long-term relationships, because all long-term relationships look this way. This is the whole point, and it provides us with a tremendous and extraordinary and unique opportunity.

This is an opportunity many, if not most, parents have never considered in this context. I wonder if you've ever thought to ask yourself this question: "What activities have I consciously introduced into my child's life that are specifically designed to teach them who they need to become in order to learn how to navigate their way through long-term relationships?" Let me repeat that, "What activities have I consciously introduced into my child's life that are specifically designed to teach them who they need to become in order to learn how to navigate their way through long-term relationships?"

It's my hope that at some point within your very first music lessons, your teacher had this conversation with you. Let's say your child's name is Jack. Your teacher may have said something like this, "Look, if we're going to maximize the likelihood of Jack having music as a companion for the rest of his life, then the reality is that he's entering into a long-term relationship, and I can absolutely predict precisely what's going to happen. He's going to love this process this month and then not love it next month. He's going to want to do it one week, and not want to do it another. It's going to be fabulous today and then tomorrow it's not going to be. It's going to be great, and then not great. He's going to feel like it and then not feel like it. He's going to want to practice and then not want to practice. One week he won't be able to wait to get to lessons, and the next week he won't be able to stand the thought of going to lessons."





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It's going to be like that always – some version of that – because that's the nature of all long-term relationships, regardless of the field of endeavor. And, when he's absolutely loving it, it's really important that you know that that's only temporary. And when he's not loving it, it's essential that you know that that's temporary as well, and when things are so-so, it's important that you know that that's temporary too."

The real question here for you, as the parent, is, "Who am I going to be for my child when they don't want to do this, when they don't feel like doing this, when it's not a good idea all-of-a-sudden, when they don't want to practice this week or this month or this year?" That's the question that you, as a parent, really need to stop and look at, because that's the crucial issue here. That's the critical issue that we have to address. Because if your attitude toward learning music is, "Look, I'd like my child to try this, and I want it to be fun, and of course, if it's not fun, then I'm not going to force him to do it." Well, that no problem at all, but let's just be perfectly clear about the fact that this is going to be a very, very short-term relationship – one that almost certainly guarantees that you child will never have music as a lifelong companion.

I'm saying this to you very directly, because it's the truth.

So when your child says, "This isn't fun, I don't want to do this anymore," who are you going to be for your child? Because, in that moment, if your approach is, "Look honey, if you don't feel like doing it, then you don't have to. I'm not going to force you. If it's not fun, well, then don't worry about it, you can quit," then as the parent, you need to understand that in that moment, you're teaching your child a profoundly important life lesson.

In that moment, you're teaching your child something like this: "When you come up against a plateau or a valley in a long-term relationship, which will happen in every single long-term relationship that you ever encounter throughout the rest of your life, when you come up against that hurdle, it's ok to quit."

The real opportunity here is not only to give your child music as a companion throughout their entire life, but also to teach them who they need to become in order to sustain a marriage, a career, a vocation, a partnership, an entrepreneurial endeavor. The opportunity that YOU have, as their parent, is to teach them how to sustain any and every long-term relationship with anything and everything, throughout the rest their life.

And once again, this is because all long-term relationships – personal or professional, in whatever arena it may be – always look the same – peaks, plateaus or valleys, over short, medium or long periods of time.

In knowing how long-term relationships work, you can prepare and plan ahead. So maybe at the beginning, your child is highly motivated, and you say to yourself, "This method is so wonderful, I can't believe it. He's playing so much, he practices all the time, he just loves it." Right then, you can remind yourself – this is great, and it's only temporary! You have such an enormous opportunity here.



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Now's the time, when things are going really well, to plan how you'll respond when your child wakes up one day and says "I don't want to learn music anymore." How will you deal with that, and who will you be for them in that moment? Because you know this will happen. It's a normal and essential experience in every long-term relationship.

It's crucial that you don't underestimate the importance of what I'm saying here. I'm saying that during the more challenging times, when it looks like something is wrong, there is nothing wrong.

The challenges are what's supposed to happen in long-term relationships. Long-term relationships are designed to be good and then not good. They're designed to be wonderful and then not so wonderful. And experiencing that diversity is how we learn to navigate our way through long-term relationships, because long-term relationships never end when things are great. If you look at any long-term relationship, let's say a marriage, you don't see people breaking up when they're deeply in love and their partnership is just wonderful. That's not when people break up. And I'm not saying that no relationships should ever end. But a great many relationships end in the plateaus and the valleys, because people automatically think that there's something wrong, rather than understanding that this is the design, this is the point, this is the opportunity to discover who we need to become in order to navigate our way through this phase, and reap the benefits and extraordinary value that comes from having successful long-term relationships.

## Why Do This?

Now, you may be thinking, "Why would I take such a focused position about music lessons?" Well, this is the time to honestly ask yourself, "What priority do I place on music? Do I value my child having music as a lifelong companion? Do I truly believe musical self-expression is one of the most valuable gifts I can give my child?" Because if you do, then you have a responsibility to accept the fact that your relationship with this, and your child's relationship with this, will be a long-term one. The only way to have music as a lifelong companion is to consciously, actively, deliberately engage in a long-term relationship with music.

So this leads us to the next question: "Do I value having an activity that truly begins to train my child in learning about who they need to become in order to navigate their way through the peaks, plateaus and valleys of the long-term relationships that they'll have throughout their life?"

In other words, "Do I value having an activity specifically designed to teach them about long-term relationships?"

That's really what it comes down to: Have you built into your child's life a place to practice navigating long-term relationships? Do you value music highly enough to choose music as that kind of activity? If you view music lessons as a "try it and see how it goes" activity, your child will almost certainly have only a short-term relationship with music. And that's the polar opposite of our goal for your child to have music as a lifelong companion.



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If you're not totally clear about this choice, then you'll eventually find yourself sustaining the myths that have plagued music lessons for generations. You'll continue to relate to music lessons as something people just "try", something where "only the gifted and/or disciplined students make it through". When your child hits a plateau or valley, you'll see it as a problem – a problem with the method, a problem with the teacher, or a problem with your child, or a problem with you. You'll almost certainly think something like, "Music is hard. My child just doesn't have the talent or passion", or "doesn't have the discipline," or, "it's not for him or her". Blah, blah, blah. Same old, same old.

But, whether you face it or not, the reality remains the same: in any field of endeavor, for every person, every time, if it involves a long-term relationship, there will be peaks, valleys and plateaus that last for short, medium, or long periods of time. End of story.

## The Choice

Only you can decide whether music is something you value highly enough to commit to this long-term relationship. There's plenty of evidence showing how music makes kids smarter in every area. We're beginning to realize in an entirely new way, and with stark clarity, how vital creative thinking is to the type of world we're heading into, and how central this is going to be in your child's ability to not just make a living, but to flourish in the type of future that we're heading towards. And we're seeing that a child who is immersed in music learning develops a brain that grows differently, that's more connected and that functions at a uniquely higher level.

And I say that musical self-expression is vital in a much more powerful and fundamental way. I believe it's vital to our very nature as human beings, and that's it's never been more important in such a highly technological world, to foster and nurture and nourish the beautiful humanity of our musicality, and to stay deeply connected and in touch with that fundamental and natural part of our self-expression. I believe there's no more incredible gift you could give your child than having music as a lifelong companion. But you, as the parent, are the only one who can come to believe this for yourself.

If you do choose to place a high value on giving your child musical self-expression as a lifelong companion, then you have a wonderful opportunity in your hands. When your child reaches a plateau or a valley, and doesn't want to practice, or doesn't feel like going to lessons, or any other version of this, you can say to yourself, "Hey, something is perfectly right about this; this is exactly what is supposed to happen. And now, I have the opportunity to teach my child how to navigate their way through this phase of their long-term relationship. And the tools that I teach them to use, the way I support them, the way I stand by them, the way I encourage them, and the way I hold them accountable to their commitment, isn't just about music lessons. It's this very time, and how I handle this very time, that's going to translate into every long-term relationship in their life, for the rest of their life." That's the possibility that you're holding in your hands!



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And with that possibility in mind, you need to stand firm, with commitment and compassion, and simply require it of them, just as you do in every other area in their lives that you hold as a non-negotiable, high priority – going to school, doing their homework, brushing their teeth, going to church, eating healthy food, exercising – whatever your priorities are. Because for a child to come to believe that a commitment is important to them, they must see and experience that you believe it is, and that you are committed to them having it, and that you won't cave in during those times when they would. This is long-term relationship parenting by modeling in the purest form.

## About Parents Being Involved

In our program at Simply Music, we ask that parents be present at the lessons. Parents often ask, "Why do I need to attend the lessons?" At a basic and practical level there are numerous reasons – so that parents help their child understand the lesson content, so that they can make sure the child practices correctly, and that they help the child understand the concepts. And there's no doubt that for these reasons it's highly important and beneficial. However, these benefits aren't as important as the underlying, overwhelmingly important reason.

The critical reason why we ask that parents attend is because of the statement it makes to their child. It says to their child, "I value music, and I value the role that it's going to play in your life. I am committed, as your parent, to doing what I believe is in your best interest. Having music as a lifelong companion is going to contribute something extraordinary to your life. In addition, you're going to be dealing with the ups and downs of long-term relationships forever, and my role as a parent is to train you, to support you and to assist you along the way in helping you to discover who you need to become in order to reap the benefits of that."

Every parent understands that a newborn child doesn't have the ability to physically provide for themselves. We completely know and accept that our role, as a parent, is to provide for our children when they're not capable of providing for themselves, until such time as they've learned how to. Where we get into trouble is when we think that this process stops as our children get a little older, because in many ways it doesn't. While babies and very young children need parents to completely provide for them physically, as they get a little older the responsibility shifts somewhat. But the responsibility doesn't disappear. Rather, it's the way that we need to provide for our children that changes. As our children get older, we need to stand by them and provide for them as they build functional life skills. They need us to help them learn more abstract, emotional and personal skills. Their needs in this area are no less significant than our younger children's earlier physical needs.

Quite simply, you cannot ask a child to produce the skills and tools that are needed to sustain a long-term relationship when they have never had one.



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To expect that from a child would be like expecting an infant to provide food for themselves. A child who's never experienced a long-term relationship has no idea how to sustain one. That's the opportunity we have and the role that we play as parents. We have the opportunity to provide them with an experience of the process, an understanding of the process, so they can know what it feels like and what it takes to go through that process – with a constant and certain reminder that, whatever phase they are in “this, too, will pass.” Parents need to constantly communicate to their child that each phase is only temporary. You might say to your child, “I know that right now you don't want to do this, but I'm going to support you through it, because it's worth it. I know that right now you feel like it's not fun, but I'm going to stand by you and this commitment, and you still need to practice. You've got to trust me as your parent, and that I know that it will become fun again, and you will love it again, and you'll be so glad that you stuck with it. This is important to me because it's important for you. And I'm standing firm with this, because I believe in it, and I believe in you.”

And even in those times when the child is loving the process and everything seems to be cruising, they still need to be reminded, “You're loving it, and that's wonderful, and that helps us remember why we want to stick with this during those times when it's not going to be fun, and when it feels like it's harder.”

## Method Coach and Life Coach

From the very first lessons onwards, the teacher, student and parent need to be regularly discussing the entire learning experience – specifically, the two separate domains – Method and Relationship, the latter consisting of the six components of long-term relationships and the responsibilities of the individual parties. Each person's role is vital to the entire learning process. Essentially, two coaches are needed in this process: a “Method Coach” and a “Life Coach”.

The teacher's role is to be the Method Coach, but the child also needs a Life Coach to manage their ‘at home’ experience from day to day, week to week, and to support them and help keep them on track as they navigate their way through the long-term relationship that music learning requires.

And from the very beginning, something fundamental must be understood by the parent. It is impossible for the music teacher to be both the Method Coach and the Life Coach. A music teacher doesn't even have the opportunity that a school teacher has to be with your child, where it can be hours every single day. The music teacher only gets 30 to 60 minutes in the lesson each week, and that's it. But the lesson time isn't where the long-term relationship component occurs. The lesson time isn't where the magic of music education occurs, and it's not where the opportunity of this program occurs. The opportunity and the magic of this program occur in the six days and twenty-three hours when the music teacher is not with your child. The teacher's role is to be punctual, to be prepared, to deliver a brilliant method to the best of their ability, and to open a gateway so that your child can walk down a path with you as their committed partner.



# Transcript: The Relationship Conversation for Parents



As a parent, you have to be the Life Coach partner in this process. In partnership with the Method Coach, you need to know where your child is at, at any given time, with regard to what they're experiencing. And you need to constantly be the voice that gently reminds them that when they're loving the lessons and the process, it's going to pass, it's going to be temporary. When they're not loving the lessons and the process, you need to constantly be the voice that gently reminds them that this too is going to pass, it's going to be temporary.

Your child, as the student, is also part of the process. Their responsibility is to learn how to trust both of their coaches, and follow through on their commitment when they feel like it, as well as when they don't, when they want to, as well as when they don't, when it seems like a great idea, as well as when it doesn't.

## Being Aligned

Together, this trinity – the Method Coach, the Life Coach, and the student – make up the team that's needed to reach the goal of the child having music as a lifelong companion. And in order to be successful, all three of you need to be aligned from the very beginning. Each of you need to understand, starting from the very first lessons, the nature of long-term relationships. You all need to understand that this program offers not only the opportunity to have music as a lifelong companion, but also the opportunity to create a breakthrough in our very relationship to the learning process itself.

Each team member needs to know exactly what role they play in this process. What is the teacher's role and responsibility? What is the student's role and responsibility? What is the parent's role and responsibility? The more clear you are about this, the more successful and smooth the entire journey will be.

It's essential to understand that The Relationship Conversation never ends. It's the way we remain very clear about and connected to what this journey is about and how it will proceed.

If you've engaged in this conversation from the beginning, and throughout the process, you won't be at all surprised or worried when a plateau or valley comes along. You'll all know, from the very beginning, that as much as the child loves learning music right now, that at any time, for any reason, or for no particular reason, the child could wake up one day and just not feel like practicing, or playing, or having lessons. If you know this is coming, if you're aligned with the goal of having music be a companion in your child's life for the rest of their life, if you're a committed partner with the teacher in this process, then when those more challenging moments occur, you won't be sitting there saying to yourself, "Something's wrong!" No, you'll be saying, "OK, right, we're just going through that phase at this point. We're in a plateau, or we're in a valley. Now's the time I get to teach my child who to be and how to be in long-term relationships."





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And It needs to be reiterated. This is something to discuss not only at the outset, but as an ongoing conversation throughout your child's years in their music lessons. In fact, looking at the visual graph that we provide that represents long-term relationships, I recommend that you refer to it regularly, most importantly when things are going great. You can just point the graph and ask your child, "Where are you on the graph? Are you here, or are you here?" You provide them with a visual reminder of what the entire process is going to look like, of the peaks and plateaus and valleys, through short, medium or long periods of time. It's a powerful, visual reminder of what's going to occur, and what the bigger picture is all about – having music as a lifelong companion, and developing the life-skills to succeed in long-term relationships!

## Your Long-Term Relationship

I want to finish with one final point. As a parent of a child who's learning music, you too have entered into a long-term relationship. How is that relationship going to look? Well, it's going to have six components to it – peaks, plateaus and valleys, for short or medium or long periods of time. That's what's supposed to happen. You need to know that that's going to happen. The question is, who are you going to be for yourself when that occurs?

You'll probably need a support person too, your own Life Coach. Whether it's another Simply Music parent, a friend, or your partner in life, just make sure that you have a support person. Because when you go through those periods, it's not that something's wrong, it's that something is terribly right – maybe not as pleasant or desirable – but nonetheless absolutely right. And unfortunately, sometimes, being 'right' doesn't mean being 'easy'. When it's tough, having a partner to back you up, having someone there to support you, can make all the difference.

Wherever you are on your personal graph, that's exactly where you're supposed to be. And it's your opportunity to discover who you need to become in order to navigate your way through this opportunity – to discover who you need to become in order to give your child two extraordinary gifts – having musical self-expression as a lifelong companion, and having a powerful learning experience in successfully navigating the fundamentals of long-term relationships, in other words, life itself.

