

HOW TO HELP YOUR  
CHILD START PLAYING

# THE DRUMS



BY: ELIAS BERLINGER

# I BELIEVE MOST PARENTS WOULD LOVE TO HAVE THEIR CHILD PLAY AN INSTRUMENT!

Living a musical life can be a joy, and childhood is the absolute best time to get started when learning an instrument. As parents, we want the best for our children, and when it comes to music, we want them to thrive. So, what is the best instrument to get your child started on? This depends on the child! Some will gravitate to certain instruments and stick with them, some will try out a few instruments before finding one that they like most, and some will learn and play multiple instruments.



But, we're here to talk about the drums! I love the drums. I have played the instrument since childhood and still strive to become a better drummer each and every day. It's a journey, and a joy to have a relationship with music through an instrument, and the drums are a fantastic instrument to have that relationship with. But we all know that the drums come with their challenges. First off, they are an outlier instrument in that drummers don't play melodies, but rather rhythms!

Second, they are loud. Third, drum sets can be expensive and big, and we need a proper place to set them up that won't disturb the neighbors or other people in the house. How do we get around these things and get our kids started playing the drums in the easiest way possible?

## LET'S DIVE IN!



# **DRUMS ARE NOT A MELODIC INSTRUMENT, THEY ARE A RHYTHMIC INSTRUMENT.**



This is great in my opinion! Rhythm is inherent to humans (whether we think we have good rhythm or not). Drums are one of the earliest instruments that mankind played, and in contemporary music they are the heartbeat of the music.

I often compare the drummer to the conductor in rock, jazz and popular musical styles, because they directly control the tempo, dynamics (volume), and feel of the songs. When a drummer plays a steady tempo, so does the band, when a drummer plays quieter, the band sounds quieter, when they play louder, the band plays louder. Drummers are in the driver's seat when it comes to controlling the music. Playing the drums is a lot more than "boom, tap, boom, tap." Additionally, there can be so much joy in how the body moves, flows and works together when playing the drum set. The hands, feet and mind all connect and work harmoniously to create music that conveys a feeling and sets a foundation for the other musicians to play to. Many children simply connect with this instrument, which is just great!

In addition, lots of children who start off playing the drums develop an amazing sense of rhythm, coordination and dynamics, and then take those skills to other instruments that they may choose to learn, like the piano, guitar or bass. Either way the drums are a fantastic instrument.



## **BUT THE DRUMS ARE LOUD! WHAT DO WE DO?**

While this is a fact, there are some ways we can make the drums quieter and a little easier to manage. If your child ends up with an acoustic drum set (the typical drum sets that tend to be pretty loud with drums and cymbals and aren't electric), you can put pads on the drums and cymbals to quiet them, you can use quiet drum heads (the part of the drum that is struck by the stick), quiet cymbals and even sticks that make playing the drums quieter. You can also choose to purchase an electronic drum set. Yes, they are more expensive than acoustic drum sets, but if your budget allows, they are much quieter and many modern electric drum sets feel and sound like acoustic drums. They also don't require regular tuning or some of the other maintenance that acoustic sets do (check out our recommendations for drum sets and more [here](#)). Regardless of what direction you choose to go, I would recommend that you create a dedicated space for your young drummer to play somewhere in your home. You'll want the instrument to be accessible so you child can go and play for their regular practice and when they feel the call of the music!!

**THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT YOU  
HAVE OPTIONS TO PURCHASE  
A DRUM SET AND MAKE IT LESS  
DISRUPTIVE, REGARDLESS OF  
YOUR BUDGET.**



# DRUM SETS ARE EXPENSIVE AND BIG!

Like many things drums come in a range of prices. The general rule is that you get what you pay for, but luckily there are many great entry level drums sets that won't break the bank and are great for kids. It's true that there are many pieces to a drum set that you will likely have to purchase and help your child set up.



There is the drum set, cymbals, cymbal stands, pedal, seat and sticks. But, don't let this intimidate you. Many drum sets come pre-packaged with all of these goodies, so you don't have to buy them separately. If you do choose to buy them individually it isn't too tricky to understand. We have some recommendations for all these things below, as well as an instructional video in the [members area of My Music Workshop](#) on how to set up drums properly for your child.

You might be surprised at how small of a footprint drums can take up. Of course, you might have seen some drummers with their enormous drum sets wrapping around them. That is one of the beautiful things about the drums, they are customizable instrument. Some drummers play big sets, some play small ones. It is my recommendation that beginning drummers use small drum sets with less pieces (*see photo*).

These smaller sets don't take up all too much space. Smaller sets also make learning the fundamentals easier. Most the of the important stuff on the drums can be played with just a few drums and cymbals, the rest is "icing on the cake," and better saved for the experienced players. The best drummers can make just a few pieces sound like a whole percussion section!

Now that we know that we can get a drum set that isn't too expensive, won't be too loud and won't take up much space, it's time to talk about what to look for when purchasing (or borrowing) a drum set for your child to play.

# DIAGRAM OF A DRUM SET

This is an acoustic drum set but if you have an electric set the layout is the same. The main pieces are the bass drum, snare drum and hi hats (some might also include the ride cymbal). The bass drum makes a low-pitched sound and is played with the foot (right foot for righties left foot for lefties), by pressing the bass drum pedal.



The snare drum is the drum that sits between the knees of the drummer and makes the short, usually higher pitched sound. The hi hats are two cymbals that stack on top of one another. The bottom cymbal is upside down, the top is right side up. They can be opened or closed using the pedal on the hi hat stand. When played open they make a ringy or jangly, longer sound. When played closed they make a short, tight sound that is often described as being a “chick” sound. The most basic (but also extremely popular and widely used) drum beat is one where the bass drum and snare drum alternate, bass, snare, bass, snare, and the high hats are played with the bass and snare and also between each of those hits (check out the drum lesson called Drum Groove 1 at [My Music Workshop](#) to learn this beat).

# YOU CAN LEARN TO PLAY THE DRUMS USING JUST THESE THREE PIECES!

I love to just set up what we call “kick (bass drum), hat, snare” and just jam with these three parts of the instrument. Most drum beats are based around these three pieces with some things periodically added on the other drums and cymbals.



The drums above and to the right of the snare are called tom toms. They play more of an open, pitched sound. The smaller the drum the higher the pitch. Many drum sets have either two or three tom toms. Two, is plenty for your child to start with (even one is fine). The cymbal over to the right is called the ride cymbal. Its purpose is similar to the hi hat in that it essentially helps the drummer keep time. Simple and steady patterns are played on the ride to keep the music flowing and moving forward. The other cymbals are called crash cymbals and are using for more explosive musical punctuations. There you have it the drum set!

When you get a set for you child make sure that it has at least a bass drum, snare drum and high hat. It's also usually beneficial to have one, two, or three tom toms and a ride cymbal, if possible, but these extra pieces are not essential to get started.

Depending on the age and height of your child you'll want a drum set that fits them now and that they can grow into. I'd recommend getting a set where the bass drum is 16" but no bigger than 18". This will allow the tom tom(s) that sit above the bass drum to be low enough for your child to reach. It will also make playing the bass drum pedal a bit more controllable for a child (the longer the bass drum beater is the harder it is to manage).





When your child is seated, their knees should be bent at about 90 degrees, and they should be able to place their foot on both the bass drum pedal and the hi hat pedal comfortably without their knees too far apart. It is ok if they sit a little higher but sitting lower is not recommended as it can put stress on the body.

My recommendation for a snare drum size is 12" but no bigger than 13". The snare will sit on a snare stand (that may or may not come with your drum set). When placed on the stand, and when your child is seated with their knees bent at about 90 degrees, the top of the snare should sit between the top of the legs and the belly button. Make sure the snare drum can easily be reached when your child is holding their drum sticks and their elbows are at the sides of their body, not reaching forward. The snare can be slightly angled toward the drummer. The reason to use a smaller snare drum is to make sure the drum fits comfortably between the child's knees without them having to distance their legs too far apart to accommodate a larger drum. Smaller snare drums also make a very cool sound in my opinion!

The hi hat pedal should be placed on the left of the snare drum (for righties) about equal distance from the snare drum as the bass drum pedal is to the right of the snare drum. The hi hats should be positioned about the same height as the ribs when the drummer is seated. The drummer will cross their arms (or sticks) to play the hi hat and snare together, with the right over the left (for righties).

The right hand will play the hi hat and the left arm will play the snare drum (this will be opposite for lefties). Make sure there is a comfortable amount of distance between the two arms (or sticks) as they cross. I recommend 12" hi hats for kids but no larger than 13".







## YOU'LL WANT TO GET A GOOD DRUM SEAT (CALLED A DRUM THRONE),

that is comfortable to sit on for longer stretches of time. Make sure it isn't wobbly, is easy to adjust and is sturdy. Don't underestimate the importance of the throne. Sitting comfortably is key to playing the drums. We've put a good throne, that won't break the budget into our instruments recommendation area [here](#).

I recommend the drumstick size 7A for most kids. With drum sticks the higher the number the smaller the stick. For example, a 7A stick is thinner than a 5A stick. The next bigger size from 7A is 5A and 5A can be a good size for slightly older, larger or stronger children. You may have to get a pair of each to see which feels better to your child. As they gain more experience, they'll develop a feel for the sticks they like and prefer a size and a brand (the same size stick made by different companies can feel very different to the experienced drummer).



# ELECTRONIC DRUM SETS



If you are going with an electronic drum set, I believe the two best brands in the industry are Roland and Alesis (check out our recommendations for Roland and Alesis drum sets [here](#)). Roland is the best but is the most expensive, Alesis is also great but a little less expensive. The seating positions and drum placements I recommended above will all be the same for an electronic set, but the drum and cymbal sizes won't apply. Electronic drum sets come in pre-packaged configurations and the electronic drums and cymbals are generally smaller in diameter than their acoustic counterparts. If you consider an electronic drum set, I highly recommend you purchase one that has a bass drum that is played with a bass drum pedal. Some electronic drum sets have a built-in bass drum trigger pedal that is not played like an actual bass drum pedal. These make it hard to learn proper bass drum playing technique and I suggest avoiding them if possible. Here is the difference.



# WHAT SHOULD YOU DO ABOUT LESSONS AND PRACTICE?



There are many ways to go about starting lessons for you child. I think our drum program at My Music Workshop is top notch! It starts children by learning the very basics of proper drumming teaches them lots of drum beats, and gives them fun music to practice to. We include practice music with each and every lesson, which makes practice much more fun and rewarding, especially for kids. If you want to give My Music Workshop a try you can visit the site [here](#).

It can also be a good option to find a private drum teacher in your area. If you do decide to go this route, I recommend that you make sure they have experience with children. Make a few calls to former or current students to make sure they can keep kids motivated. Or, at the very least meet the teacher first to get a sense of whether they would be an engaging teacher for you child. One of the biggest keys for children, when they learn an instrument is to stay excited and interested in playing that instrument. The teacher plays a big part in that. At My Music Workshop we prioritize making our lessons fun, paced correctly for kids and set up so kids feel successful and want to learn more.

I recommend that your child learn at least one new concept on the drums each week (with My Music Workshop lessons that would be one new "Groove"). Then, your child should practice at least 15 minutes a day, at least three days per week. More than that is better but try to stick to at least that much practice. They can also jam (just play anything and have fun on the drums), but make sure this is separate from the learning and practice that they do.





You should now be all set and ready to help your child become the next Ringo Starr, John Bonham, Neil Peart, Cindy Blackman, Steve Gadd, Steve Jordan, or Vinnie Colaiuta. Don't worry, if you don't know any of those drummers. Your child may never become a world class, professional drummer but just building a relationship with music through an instrument is an incredible journey that you should embrace and be proud to help your child with. Enjoy every second, although every second may not always seem enjoyable to the parent of a drummer 😊.

For more tips on how to help your child succeed when learning an instrument check out our short eBook for parents *"10 Simple Ways to Support Your Child as They Learn an Instrument."*

**HAVE FUN AND BEST OF LUCK ON  
YOUR CHILD'S MUSICAL JOURNEY!**