

Imaginative Games for Children:

Ball Games: Bounce or roll up and down or back and forth to the count of 1, 2. Sing easy songs with the child such as “Cuckoo” or “Twinkle, Twinkle.” Keep the rhythm even while you count to the bounce or roll.

Getting the guitar out: Have the child stand about ten feet away from the guitar, which rests in its case. You say, “Ready, get set, go! Start counting “1, 2, 3, 4, 5,” etc., as the child quickly runs to the guitar case opens it quickly, removes the guitar establishes a sitting position with the correct posture and position. When the student is “ready” you time him or her when they are all set to play.

Listening game: Play certain notes on the guitar and have the child identify the sounds as “high or low.” When the student can easily distinguish between the “high” and “low” notes have them match pitches and when that is established sing back “do” “re” “mi,” etc. This is the beginning of training their ears. Also, have students imitate an ambulance siren or sounds like engines animals, rushing water, etc. or ask them to imitate the different instruments with their voices.

Conductor: Have the student play conductor. Teach them a 2 pattern and play while they conduct you. Once the 2 pattern is established add 4 and 3 patterns.

Fingering: Have the student trace his or her left and right hand on a piece of paper and then have them draw the symbols P, I, M, A, and 1, 2, 3, 4, If appropriate you could assign silly names for the right hand fingers: P=thumbkin, I=pointer, M= middleman, A= ringman

Rhythm cards: Mark different rhythm patterns on separate card and have the child clap the rhythms while saying the rhythm syllables ta=quarter note, ti=eighth note takataka=4 sixteenth notes. At first have the child clap the pulse while you demonstrate (clap) the rhythm. You may also wish to have the child alternate between hand-clapping and knee-slapping.

Hand-Clap game: Have the child alternate between knee-slapping and hand-clapping while singing a piece.

Freeze game: Have the child start to play a piece. When you call out “freeze,” the child must stop playing immediately. You then check the child’s posture and hand positions. This is an especially good game to play if you wish to correct faulty posture, hand positions, thumb position, etc.

Pick a piece to play: Mark all the pieces in your students repertoire on squares of colored paper. Put all the pieces in a box and let the student choose which piece he or she wants to play.

Rhythm sticks: Using colored sticks arrange a rhythm pattern for the student to clap. Then gather up the sticks and have the student arrange them on a board, making up a new rhythm pattern. Clap this rhythm together.

What song is this?: Play the first phrase of a piece and have the student complete the song. Or hum the first notes of a piece and have the student play the rest. Sometimes, for variety, play “turn-about” by letting the student become the “teacher” and play the first few notes of the piece.

Leave-it-out game: Play a song, such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” with the student, both of you leaving out one specified note as you both continue to play the song in correct rhythm.

Add a note game: Play a short pattern of notes that the child has not heard before. The student should then play the same pattern immediately afterwards. Then play the same pattern but add one new note. The student should then play the new pattern. Continue until a reasonable number of notes have been added.

Out of tune guitar or wrong notes: Play a piece with deliberately out of tune guitar or wrong notes. The student should call out every time a sour note is heard.

Follow the leader: Begin a piece and stop at a certain place in the music. Immediately the student should pick up at that point and continue the piece without a break in rhythm. Switch on and off between having the teacher and the student play and stop and then play again.

Grade 1 to 10: Have the student play a piece with special attention to one aspect of the music: for example legato playing, even rhythm or correct notes. Then ask the student to grade his or her own performance on a scale of 1 to 10.

I remembered: This game involves repetition to improve a certain passage, posture, hand position, etc. Give the child five chips, and you retain five chips. Then say to the child, "If you remember to keep your fingers down (or play a passage smoothly, etc.) while you play those two measures, then tell me "I remembered" and I'll give you one of my chips. If you forget, then I get one of your chips. Keep playing until one person gets all the chips.

Counting game: Clap out rhythms, say out loud the counts. Use recordings or play examples to demonstrate especially difficult or unusual rhythms.

Using the metronome: Encourage students to use a metronome when practicing. Have students clap along with the metronome. Use one that accents different time signatures and guess which one you are in. Challenge students to clap with the metronome so they cannot hear the click. Have the student work on setting the metronome themselves to various tempos you give them. This develops a metronome doesn't lie attitude.

Listening exercises and games: Put on a recording and have students identify characteristics of the performance. What kind of instrument plays the melody? What time signature is the piece in? Was the beginning louder or softer than the end? How many times in the song did the singer sing?

Increasing dexterity: Repetition is an important part of increasing dexterity but it can also be boring to a child. Develop games of repetition using timers, stop watches or challenges. "How long can you play this passage without making a mistake?" "Let's play this together and see who messes up first." "Let's see how fast we can play this passage" or "Let's see if we can make this shift and hit this high note before we finish today's lesson."

Some considerations when determining if a child is ready for guitar instruction

Does the child show an interest in learning to play the guitar by picking one up at a friend's house or at a music store?

Is his or her attention span long enough to practice ten minutes at a time?

Is there good coordination of small hand muscles?

Are the child's parents willing to supervise the practice sessions?

Is there enough time set aside each day for practice when there will be no outside interference from television, video games, etc.

Helpful Equipment

Small quarter or half size guitar

Capo for “moving” the nut up to the third or fifth fret

Flashcards

Magnetic board or a white board with lines

Crayons, pencils, markers, etc.

Incentives and rewards such as, stickers, candy, bubble gum, prizes, diplomas or positive response statements

Beginning Method Books for Children

Anderson; Learn to Play the Ensemble way

Mel Bay; Children's Guitar Method

Bennet; Guitar for the Small Fry, Vol. 1, 2 and 3

Cracknell; Enjoy Playing the Guitar

Koyama; Guitar Method for Children

Michelson; New Dimensions in Classical Guitar for Children

Duarte; The Young Persons way to the Guitar

Suzuki; Suzuki Guitar School