

# Joanna Clare's Violin Studio

## Policy Handbook

Written By Joanna Clare

Updated March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024



# **A. INTRODUCTION AND ADMISSION**

## **A1. THE PURPOSE OF THIS HANDBOOK**

The purpose of this handbook is to explain to parents and students the policies of my studio, my commitments to my students, and the resources that are available to parents and students to streamline student initiation.

## **A2. MY PHILOSOPHY**

The mission of this studio is “to develop in students a life-long passion for learning by honoring each student’s natural ability through musical and artistic training.”

My students learn by ear as beginners. I teach them to read music as they grow more familiar with the instrument. They must sing each tune to get the song in their inner ear before learning to play it on the violin. This requirement helps students learn the piece more thoroughly and accurately. The slow pace allows them to feel comfortable playing each piece before moving on to the next one. Students learn what to practice and how to physically maneuver the instrument to allow the desired sound to emerge. My students often take videos or record parts of their lessons to capture what they need to learn during the week.

## **A3. ADMISSION**

Students are admitted based on current availability. The studio serves children as young as three and a half years old and adults, provided they are comfortable with my teaching style and are committed to practicing at home.

Before the start of lessons, I will discuss lesson expectations on the phone with prospective students/parents. We will make sure that what I offer and what you are looking for are compatible.

Child students are required to observe other students having lessons before starting lessons. Observations allow children to get acquainted with my methodology of teaching, understand studio expectations, and build excitement before lessons start.

Depending on the student’s age and experience with music, I will recommend the number of lessons the student should observe before starting individual lessons. Transfer students (students who have played violin in other studios or through school) are also required to observe lessons but can do so concurrently with their first few lessons.

Once families observe, we will determine together whether my studio is a good fit for you, and at that point, we will schedule lessons.

## **A4. NEW STUDENT REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

Parents and adult students are required to complete a pre-enrollment form so that I have important information all in one place. The form must be submitted by the student's first observation, (or lesson, for adult students).

Parents and adult students are required to sign this policy handbook to confirm that they have read and understood everything, and return the last page to me by their second lesson.

#### A5. UPDATE OF INFORMATION

Periodically, I request that parents/adult students submit an updated form to ensure that all contact and emergency information is current. If at any point contact or medical information changes, please fill out the update form. The information update form is not as detailed as the New Student Registration Form and will be on my website, [www.joannaclare.com](http://www.joannaclare.com).

#### A6. ENROLLING DIFFERENTLY-ABLED STUDENTS

Enrollment for differently-abled students will be determined by the teacher. Students must be able to use their arms and understand English moderately well. Concerns that emerge after admission to the studio will be addressed as they occur to determine the best course of action. I honor that many children are neurodivergent, and the studio is committed to tailoring teaching styles to fit the learning style of the child. My studio complies with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act in the enrollment of these students.

#### A7. PARENT EXPECTATIONS

Parents of students under 14 are expected to be present during all lessons. For the first year of lessons, I ask that the same parent comes to lessons each week. This will ensure that the parent is consistently on the same page with training and that there is no lack of communication regarding what and how to practice. Parents of students under 14 are expected to practice with their child every day. Learning the violin is a learning experience for the child but also a child-parent bonding experience. Parents of Suzuki students are required to read *Nurtured by Love and Ability Development from Age Zero*, both by Dr. Suzuki, and are recommended to read *Building Violin Skills* by Edmund Sprunger to maximize effectiveness as a Suzuki parent. Keep in mind that my teaching differs a little from *Building Violin Skills* in some beginning techniques such as bow hold. However, the book is excellent for outlining guidelines for the parent-student practice partnership. I own all three of these books and am willing to lend them to parents.

Parents are expected to sit quietly during lessons and take notes. Parents often feel the urge to verbally correct their children during lessons, but I ask that they refrain from doing so, as a triangle of communication and different sources of directions can be distracting. For beginning students, I will instruct the parents and involve them for a portion of the lesson, to make sure they are prepared to be the home teacher.

#### A8. PARENT/TEACHER CONFERENCES

Two planned parent/teacher conferences are scheduled around October and April/May of each year to discuss the progress of any child under 18. These conferences will be scheduled to accommodate both my schedule and the parents. Parents are encouraged to message, call, or schedule an in-person conference if they have concerns at any time throughout the year. I ask that these appointments be made in advance. There is no charge for these conferences, as they are used to ensure satisfaction for parents, students, and teachers.

## **B. SCHEDULING**

### **B1. STUDIO SCHEDULE**

Continuity in lessons is very important. The studio operates as a year-round program and is open 12 months per year except for certain holidays and breaks. Occasionally, I will have other commitments during regularly scheduled lessons, such as tours or festivals. Lessons that conflict with these commitments will be rescheduled or canceled typically before scheduling for that month. If my absence spans multiple weeks (infrequent), I will suggest a substitute teacher for the student during that timeframe.

For students who are taking lessons on Sunday in conjunction with the Baltimore Irish Music School, I occasionally will be available for lessons on Sundays that are not listed in the school's calendar. I'll be in communication with parents regarding these occasions.

### **B2. LESSON TIMING AND SPACING**

Students may elect to take lessons weekly, biweekly, or monthly. Weekly lessons allow students to grow at a faster pace because I can correct playing habits early. Practice makes permanent, so the longer a student practices sub-optimally, the more it gets ingrained.

I will suggest how long each lesson lasts depending on the age of the student, their intentions with learning, and their level of playing. Typically, beginner children should attend 30-minute lessons. As the student progresses, lesson length typically increases to allow everything required for a student of that level to be covered within the lesson time. Adults typically have 45-minute lessons or hour-long lessons.

### **B3. ONLINE LESSONS**

It is critical for the development of students new to the violin to take in-person lessons. However, online lessons are available to intermediate and advanced students who live too far away to travel for lessons. I will determine whether a student has learned the skills required to benefit from regularly scheduled online lessons. One-off online lessons are discussed in section B7.

### **B4. MY MUSIC STAFF**

My Music Staff is an online platform that allows for lesson scheduling and payment, among other features. For each month, I will input our lesson schedule into My Music Staff. Parents/students will receive invoices via email for each month that are created on the platform, and all payments will be made through each student's individual My Music Staff portal.

#### B5. SCHEDULING LESSONS

All lessons are scheduled in monthly batches. Most students will have a typical lesson time as discussed but provided our schedules align, lessons may be scheduled at other times. For example, if a student's regularly scheduled lesson is on Saturday, and I am teaching workshops for a festival on a Saturday, I will work with parents and students to adjust the lesson time for that week. If we cannot find another time that will work, we will have to skip that lesson for that week. Students/parents can text or email me with any scheduling discrepancies on their end. By the 20th of the month before the scheduling month, I will input each student's tentative schedule into My Music Staff. This schedule will be synced with each student's My Music Staff portal, so students and parents will be able to view their scheduled lessons. On the 20th, an invoice will be automatically delivered via email. Students/parents have until the end of the day on the 24th to reach out to me to adjust any of the lesson times and dates. Students will only be charged for the number of lessons that are scheduled for a given month. Payments will then be due on the 25th.

#### B6. LESSON CANCELATIONS

A lesson cancelation is defined as a canceled lesson after the payment due date (the 25th). If a student cancels and is not able to reschedule it according to the rescheduling policy in section B8, the canceled lesson will not be refunded. If I cancel a lesson and the student is not able to reschedule it within the month, the payment for the lesson will be applied to the next month's scheduled lessons.

#### B7. ALTERNATIVE LESSON FORMAT

If a student is sick (and still able to play), if there is inclement weather, if transportation is not an option, or if there are other extenuating circumstances, students have the option to attend their lesson via Zoom or Facetime in lieu of canceling so that they can maintain continuity in their learning. Please notify me at least two hours before the scheduled lesson time regarding this change.

#### B8. RESCHEDULING LESSONS

Students are permitted to reschedule lessons until a month after the lesson was originally scheduled conditional upon my availability. Students are not able to reschedule lessons to replace a lesson that would regularly be scheduled for the month prior. For example, if a student reschedules a missed lesson in March, they'd have to have an additional lesson than their typical scheduled lessons in April. I do my best to adjust my schedule to accommodate

rescheduling, but I cannot promise that our schedules will align. Students can reschedule during open lesson slots in the My Music Staff portal. If your schedule does not align with any of the open lesson slots, please message me, and I will check my availability. Rescheduling requests should be sent no later than the 24th before the originally scheduled lesson. Once a rescheduled lesson is confirmed, I will input it into My Music Staff.

#### B9. DISCONTINUATION OF LESSONS

If a student wishes to terminate lessons, they may do so at any time. If lessons are already scheduled for the month before the student wishes to cancel, they will not be refunded. Therefore, I recommend that if a student is going to discontinue lessons, they do so at the end of the month. I am always sad to see students go. My studio will always have space to restart lessons with former students.

#### B10. COMMUNICATION OUTSIDE OF LESSON TIMES

I strive to be available for communication when necessary for lesson scheduling and rescheduling. Feel free to message me at any time of the day, and I will respond as soon as possible. During the week, I work as a manufacturing engineer, and I don't always have time before 5:00 pm to check my phone and respond to any messages. However, I typically take lunch between 12:00-1:00 pm, and I can communicate with parents and students during that time.

#### B11. GROUP CLASSES

In the fall, I am planning to start a variety of group classes for Suzuki students, children learning Irish fiddle, and adults learning Irish fiddle. I am also planning on holding general music classes for children under 3.5 years old and their parents, as well as improvisation classes.

Attending group classes is highly encouraged and a core aspect of the Suzuki method. Group classes for children involve games, building leadership skills, socializing with other students, and preparing for group performances.

Group classes for adults will be more laid back. We will gather over refreshments, jam with tunes that students learn in individual lessons, and discuss the music.

Group classes will be held on Saturday or Sunday and will either be located at my house or St. Luke's Church on 36th Street in Baltimore. Some classes will be held through the Baltimore Irish Music School.

#### B12. PERFORMANCES

Two times a year, I will hold recitals at St. Luke's on 36th Street in Hampden, Baltimore. These recitals will typically take place in May and December and will be scheduled in January and September. I encourage all my students to play in the recital, but I do not mandate it if they do not feel comfortable. I prioritize performing being a good experience for my students, and

therefore they must have pieces chosen and performance-ready well in advance of the performance. Each cycle, I will let students know when pieces must be performance-ready. If a student is not performance-ready (as determined by me), I will ask them to watch the recital instead of performing.

## **C. FEES**

### C1. LESSON COSTS

My standard rate for lessons is \$70 for one hour, \$52.5 for 45 minutes, and \$35 for 30 minutes. These costs cover fees from the Baltimore Irish Music School and the Baltimore Music Company if lessons are taken through one of these establishments.

### C2. INVOICES

Tentative invoices will be sent via email on the 20th of the month before the scheduled month. If students need to alter the number of lessons scheduled for the scheduled month, an updated invoice will be sent as soon as possible, and not later than the payment due date (the 25th).

### C3. PAYMENT OF TUITION FEES

Tuition must be paid by the 25th of the month before the scheduling month on the My Music Staff portal. For new students, payment is due by the first lesson after observations.

### C7. NON-PAYMENT OF TUITION

If a payment is not made within 30 days of the due date, a \$10 fee will be applied to the student's account.

### C4. FAMILY DISCOUNT

For families with two or more students enrolled that regularly schedule lessons totaling greater than one hour, a 10% discount will be applied to the portion of the lesson over the hour. For example, if a family schedules 90 minutes of lessons per week, a 10% discount will be applied to the cost of 30 minutes of lesson time.

### C5. FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

I believe that all people should have the capability to take violin lessons regardless of their financial situation. If students are unable to pay the standard rate for lessons due to financial hardship, they have the option to discuss a lower rate with me. Please do not abuse this policy.

### C6. ALTERNATE PAYMENT PLANS

If a family is financially unable to pay in monthly batches or by the due date, please let me know, and I will accommodate an alternative payment plan on a case-by-case basis depending on the need.

### C7. PERFORMANCE TICKETS

For each recital, tickets for non-students will be sold for \$5 to offset the costs of any accompanists and space rental.

### C8. DONATIONS

Financially able students are encouraged to donate to the studio. Donations will be used to supplement lessons for students who require financial assistance. If you wish to donate, please send money via Zelle, PayPal, or Venmo to [joannaclaremusic@gmail.com](mailto:joannaclaremusic@gmail.com) or by check with the description "Donation". Also, if a family member or friend is looking to support the arts, this is a great opportunity and would be greatly appreciated. Unfortunately, the studio is not currently a non-profit, so donations are not tax deductible.

Donations can also be made to the Baltimore Irish Music School, which is a non-profit and provides financial assistance to students in need.

Please sign below to confirm that you have read and understood everything in this handbook, and return this page to me:

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent Name (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_

Adult Student/Parent Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_