



Young Person's Guide to String Instrument Care



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Fitting the Violin or Viola - Hold it under the chin in playing position. If the left-hand fingers can comfortably curl around the scroll, with the elbow slightly bent, the instrument is not too large. Straining to play one too big can be bad for your music or your health.

Fitting the Cello - Sit with knees bent square, the C-peg behind the left ear, the middle finger of the left hand able to touch the top of the bridge. (The violin shop can replace a too short end pin.)

Fitting the Bass - Stand behind the bass in playing position, the nut level with the temple, the middle finger of the left hand able to touch the end of the fingerboard without bending forward. (Note - the normal "adult" size bass is 3/4, not 4/4.)

Chin Rests and Shoulder Rests - These should let you play comfortably and securely. Our local schools typically recommend a low, lightweight "Teka" style chin rest and an original "Kun" shoulder rest. Look out for worn pads that might scratch your instrument.

Cleaning - Use a dry untreated cloth to clean the instrument after use - a man's handkerchief is good. If you need to clean or polish it, use only a white liquid violin shop type. Have any cracks or openings repaired first, wipe it on with a clean soft paper towel (not the dry cloth kept in your case!) and rub it all off. Keep it away from the strings, bridge, peg holes - and bow!

Bow - Don't polish the bow, or touch its hair, or wave it around. Don't drop or drag it on the floor, or touch anything but the strings with it. Tighten it just enough to play right, and loosen it after playing. Remove the bow before taking a cello or bass out of a soft case, and replace it after putting the instrument back. Round rosin is best. Rotate it as you apply it - it will last longer and not become grooved. Take your bow to the violin shop if it loses hair or becomes warped or "slippery" or cannot be adjusted.

Strings & Tuning - Use the right size strings. They should be wound just to the side of the pegbox. Tune the pegs slightly lower, then slowly up to pitch, no higher, pressing in slightly. If pegs slip or stick, have them checked by your teacher or corrected at the violin shop. After a while tuning pulls the bridge toward the fingerboard, which can make it warp or fall or affect the tone. The tailpiece side of the bridge must be kept vertical. Ask your teacher to show you how. Use fine tuners with steel core strings, but preferably not with gut and synthetic strings. If the tuner screws go in too far unscrew them (but not enough to buzz) and retune the pegs. Sometimes a sticking tuner screw can be fixed by removing it and rubbing it on a wax candle. If not, have the violin shop replace it.

Problems - If the fingerboard, sound post, or bridge comes loose or breaks, or if you find cracks or openings, loosen the strings right away and take it to the violin shop. If the strings buzz or dig deeply into the bridge, or feel too high or too low take it to the violin shop. Never glue anything yourself - and don't let your Dad - and certainly not the bridge or sound post!

Protecting Your Instrument - Don't leave it in extremes of temperature or humidity. Don't leave a cello or bass standing at a wall. Place it gently on its side on the floor, but only when you can't put it in its case, which is the safest place (it doesn't abrade the edges and protects against classmates falling over it). Use a "suspension" case if possible, flat on the floor. Close it securely before picking it up. If you must use a soft case, get a thickly padded one and beware doorways. And don't leave an instrument or bow in an open case on the floor - or on a chair for the careless or absent-minded to sit on or knock off.