

## A Listening Ear

by Sally Palmer

Last winter a student arrived at her lesson in tears. I asked her what was wrong and with a choked voice she said, "I didn't want to come to piano lessons today but my mom told me I had to." I asked her why she didn't want to come and she said she was in the middle of her homework and this wasn't her usual day to have lessons. I asked her why she couldn't come on her regular day and she said "because of ski school." I knew all of this, of course, but I wanted to make sure she understood why the change was made. She continued, with tears streaming down her face, that she couldn't come on "another day" because of her after school activity. She was clearly upset that her schedule had been changed and she had lots of homework to do.

Are you visualizing this scene? What is the age of this student in your vision? Teenager? No. This student was a 2nd grader! In my humble opinion, an over-scheduled 2nd grader! How do we help our parents with this balance of academics, sports, music, social, and family? Are there questions we can ask when interviewing students and parents? I wanted to send this poor little girl home to get some rest, but instead I tried to make it a really fun lesson, with activities, and stickers, and jokes.

We, as teachers, are asked to be more than just teachers sometimes. We are often called upon to be a different kind of listening ear. My studies in the field of Psychology have been extremely helpful as a music teacher. So many of our students are completely overwhelmed and there isn't always a solution to the situation. Our best bet is to love them. Let them know that they are loved and worthwhile, and that their thoughts and opinions matter.



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Sometimes these kids just need to "vent" in a safe environment. Be a listening ear when needed. Maybe you are the adult who can help them understand time and resource management.

Be gentle, be loving, and by all means, express your concerns with parents. Be kind in your comments and be prepared for some to possibly take offense. Always make your priority the health and well-being of the student. Don't ever forget - we are a valuable resource in the lives of our students!

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