

CUSTOMER CARE | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Overinvolved Parents

It's great to have parents involved in their kid's music lessons, but some parents have a hard time letting go. After a few music lessons, your staff may notice a parent acting as if he or she knows more about teaching music than you do. This can create an aggravating but completely treatable case of what I call teacher parent syndrome, or TPS.

Early warning signs can be subtle. Watch for "When I took piano lessons growing up, I always did it this way," or "My music teacher never made me learn notes, so why can't Johnny just learn songs and play along to music?" Teacher parents want your staff to follow *their* ideas of how to teach. Often, they'll ask a teacher to teach certain elements a student's not ready for. In many cases, teacher parents aren't educators themselves but just want the best for their kids.

Some of the worst cases of teacher parent syndrome come in the form of music teacher parents, or MTPs. These folks mean well, but since they play an instrument, they often assume they know as much as the teacher. In many cases, the MTP has taken a few lessons but never completed a music degree, studied music beyond high school or seriously continued with lessons.

CASE STUDY

A few weeks ago, a mother canceled her daughter's guitar lessons at my teaching studio. This struck me as odd since the daughter was a devoted student. I spoke with the teacher and learned that the mother worked at a local middle school and regularly compared notes with its general music teacher. This had created a long struggle with teacher parent syndrome that was at odds with our curriculum.

We met with the mother and her daughter to discuss what they both wanted from lessons and to see if we could communicate our lesson plans and end results. We explained that the daughter had gotten to the point where lesson

material was getting more difficult and that her progress would be more gradual. We reassured the mother that her daughter was advancing and that she was a talented performer, but she was facing new obstacles that required more practice. From open dialogue with the mother, we learned that activities had always come easily to her daughter. The daughter was losing interest since lessons were getting more difficult. The mother understood our position and agreed to keep her daughter enrolled. We agreed to keep her in the loop every week on her daughter's progress.

TREATING TPS

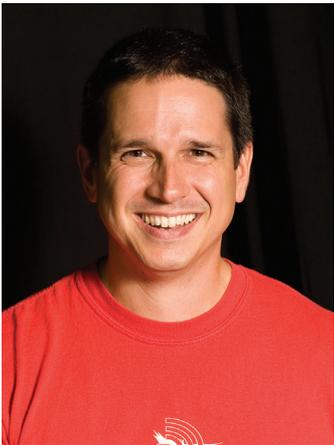
I now have three rules of thumb for recognizing and treating TPS.

1. Outline your curriculum. Make sure parents understand what you are accomplishing in every lesson by speaking with them or emailing updates each week. Give details on where you started on the first of the month and where you would like to be by the end of the month.

2. Get parents involved. Do you have parents who play in bands, want to play in bands or play an instrument at home? Get them into the lesson to jam periodically. Pick a song the student likes, and offer to teach it to the parent. This shows that you're the teacher, and more important, parents will feel as if they're contributing.

3. Make sure the parent's and student's goals are clear. Since the parent is paying the tuition, he may have expectations that Johnny should practice for a certain amount of time every day, whereas Johnny is only looking at playing an instrument recreationally. The parent and student need to be on the same page with the teacher, in terms of what's expected, the proper steps to get there and the game plan in case the student's interests change. **MI**

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Treatment options for parents who get too involved in their kid's music lessons