

Kara Carlston Piano Studio

2026 POLICIES

Teaching Philosophy

- I believe that music refines, builds, and strengthens us as human beings. It brings joy, discipline, and awareness into our lives and is a gift that gives back for the rest of your life. Even just a little understanding of music will have big returns later.
- I focus on making sure every student understands and learns basic music theory, technique, sight reading, history, performance, accompaniment, and listening skills.
- My goal is for every student to find joy in playing for themselves, use their talents to serve and bless the lives of others, and appreciate listening and supporting music for the rest of their lives.
- I use standard piano methodology for building basic skills and incorporate other music styles to teach different genres, encourage sight reading, expose students to varied learning approaches, keep it interesting, and expand their repertoire. I also want my students to take an active part in being curious about music and learn what they are interested in. There is so much good music and not enough time to learn it all. I believe that along with learning the basics, they should learn what draws them.
- Mostly, I want my students to work hard and love to play!

Schedule

- I will share with you a calendar for relevant dates, including the Spring Recital, Group Master Classes, and no-lesson weeks/days.
- If you have a conflict please let me know and we will try to schedule a make-up time that can work. The same goes for me. If I need to reschedule with you we will work to find a time to make up your lesson.
- If your child has been sick within the last 24 hours please stay home and get feeling better. I try to disinfect my piano keys regularly (more often when kids are coughing!), but we all touch the same keys and it is so easy to pass germs because we're playing on the same instrument. Please be considerate of the rest of the studio – and my kids – and stay home if you're germy and contagious. With that consideration, I will also cancel lessons if I or my kids are sick enough to be contagious.

Lessons

- I will do my best to start and end on time. We won't always get through all the music because we sometimes spend more time on different pieces, technique, or theory. Anything not covered in the lesson will be pushed to the following week. Sometimes students feel like they should be passing off songs every week. Please help them understand that the goal is not to pass off songs, but to learn music. There is a balance between going too slow and too fast and I am always conscious of that balance. I want them to feel motivated and excited, but not rushed. They need to learn the material well and have repetition and mastery before a concept or skill sticks. If I don't pass off a song immediately, it does not mean failure on their part!
- I give rewards for accomplishing certain skills, passing off books, and after Master Classes. If your child has an allergy or other dietary restriction please let me know.
- Students should come ready to work. Please no gum, no cell phones, and no smart watches. I will have a place they can put their watch or cell phone during the lesson.

Online Lessons

- If you live too far away for in-person lessons, online lessons are an option through FaceTime. Master Classes can be attended online as well. You will need a computer, iPad, or phone with a camera set up so I can see the keyboard and you.

Group Master Classes

- Group Master Classes are an invaluable time to learn things about music that we don't have time to cover in private lessons, be exposed to new artists and music, practice performing, and observe and bond with other students. Everyone is expected to be there.
- Performance, theory, ear training, and music history will be the focus in Master Class. I will periodically have a guest musician come to perform or teach.
- Students should bring their music (if performing) and a notebook to every Master Class. Not everyone will perform at every Master Class, but performing will sometimes be a part of the class.
- Group Master Class will last 1 hour and will replace lessons during the week they are held. No make up lessons will be given for missed Master Classes.

Materials

- Please bring all of your music to every lesson. We may not make it through everything every time, but be prepared.

- Every student should also bring a notebook each week for writing lesson notes. They should refer to it when practicing so they remember what we talked about during the lesson.
- It's important for students to feel ownership of their music. There is nothing quite like having a book of music that belongs to you that you learn and accomplish. And they deserve to feel proud of it! I will text you when they need to buy new music, as well as write it in their notebook. I am also happy to use older books from home.

Recitals and Performances

- There will be a Spring Recital at the end of April and a Student-Only Recital in December. Graduating students will perform in an Honors Recital. When applicable, students will learn and audition for concerto night or other performing opportunities in the community.
- Student performances occur periodically throughout the year during Group Master Class.
- It is so important for students to attend live performances. You can look at the schedules for the Utah Symphony, Temple Square, University of Utah, Brigham Young University, Utah State University, UVU, and Westminster College. There are always chamber groups performing at various venues around the state and we are lucky enough to have the Gina Bachauer International piano competition here in our own backyard. Make it a priority to attend live music!

Tuition

- Tuition will be based on an average of 4 lessons per month: 3 private lessons and 1 Group Master Class.

\$155 per month for 30 minute lessons. \$230 per month for 45 minute lessons.

- Please pay within the first week of the month.
I will send a Venmo request from: @Kara-Carlston
- Monthly tuition holds your spot in my studio. I will make every effort to reschedule a missed lesson, but won't be adjusting rates for missed lessons. However, if you will be gone for two or more weeks, please let me know and we can make an adjustment.

Practice

- Practice is where the magic happens! Slowly but surely, in the hours spent at the keyboard, a pianist is made. More importantly, a well-adjusted, hard working, confident human being is created. The discipline of consistency, working through

difficult passages, not giving up, and then seeing yourself grow and improve is one of the miracles of learning music. It truly is magic!

- Learning *how* to practice is critical to being able to play well. We will focus on how to practice as well as maintaining consistent practice. Practicing does not mean just running through your music every day. It means slowing down, taking it apart, wrestling with it, and training your fingers, muscles, brain, ears, and spirit to all work together to make a beautiful sound.
- I am always available for mid-week questions. Let me know if you want extra help!
- Every student makes a practice goal. Please know their practice goal and help them to achieve it.

Parents need to be involved with practice expectations and reminders. Your support is vital!

Consistency is so important when it comes to practicing and forming habits. *Even a few minutes on a busy day is better than nothing!* Just keeping the flow of consistency is so valuable. You should be practicing *at least* as long as your lesson – more for more advanced students. (Sometimes less for early beginners.)

- Practicing music is not the same as the other things on our to-do list. Playing music makes us less stressed, smarter, calmer, and more efficient. We perform better in everything that follows when we practice first! View practice time as oiling the engines of our brains so that our bodies and minds are ready to go! It's been scientifically proven. Music is amazing.
- Listening is a major part of learning music and one of the best tools for improving ability, interest, awareness, and understanding. I can't emphasize it enough! Students should be listening to the music they are learning as well as listening to other classical or jazz piano music. Put it on in the car. Help younger kids know how to find it on your music devices. Have it playing at home. Listen to the music performed at concerts you attend. Listen to the music they're learning.

Older Students

- I love teaching adults. I have taught students who have taken lessons for years and want to keep going, students who quit too early and want to remember how to play, new students who never learned, and students who just want to add music to their lives. I admire my adult students and their desire to keep music a part of their lives.
- Depending on the number of adults I am currently teaching, we may have a piano soiree during the year where we can play for each other, eat good food, and enjoy an evening of music and one another's company.

Observing

- I am happy to have parents observe lessons before joining my studio. However, it is distracting and disruptive to have parents sitting there for every lesson. Students can't give their whole focus and attention when part of them is aware of their parent sitting there listening. I'm happy to schedule an observation lesson or two during the year, but otherwise please wait outside or come back at the end of the lesson.

About Kara

- I studied music at BYU and worked with both Dr. Bonnie Winterton at the University of Utah and Dr. Jeffrey Shumway at BYU. I have performed solos at the University of Utah Gardner Hall and BYU Marriott Center and played and performed in various chamber groups. I have taught piano for over 30 years, accompanied professionally for over 35 years, and have arranged and composed instrumental music for over 35 years.
- My students have played in concerto nights, studied music in college, played and taught on missions, become teachers and accompanists all over the world, and brought music into the lives of their families and communities. I love to see the incredible human beings they become on their own journey.

Thank you for giving yourself and your child the gift of music!

- Kara

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