

Choosing The Right Guitar For Your Child

The quality and size of your child's instrument is a very important aspect of learning to play the guitar. Quite often a potentially enthusiastic student is put off because they have an unsuitable instrument. The first and most important thing to consider is the size of the guitar. Generally speaking children under the age of 10 are best suited to a $\frac{3}{4}$ size guitar (or even a $\frac{1}{2}$ size guitar). Between the ages 10 -13 it really depends on the size of the child's hands to know what would be most suitable. I'd highly recommend that you visit one of the local guitar shops and get some advice (more info on this below). The other essential thing to avoid is a guitar with a high action. The action is the distance of the strings from the fingerboard. The higher the action the harder it is to press the strings down. A guitar with a high action can sometimes be almost impossible to play.

There are several different types of guitar available. The three main types are:

1. **Nylon string acoustic** - This is the type of guitar most people first encounter. It is often referred to as a classical guitar and has quite a wide neck. Nylon string guitars are most commonly used for classical and Latin music.
2. **Steel string acoustic** - Steel string acoustics have a slightly narrower neck and are generally louder acoustically than nylon strung guitars. Steel string acoustics are most commonly used in pop and folk music.
3. **Electric guitar** - Electric guitars also have steel strings and are generally the easiest to play. One thing to remember though is that you will also need to buy an amplifier if you're going to hear the guitar at a reasonable volume. It's not essential to have one but if you're going to hear the guitar's full potential you will need one eventually. The other option is to plug into an iPod/iPhone/iPad and use one of the many fantastic guitar apps available. You will need an interface to be able to plug your guitar into the device; these start at around £10. (They have the added bonus of being able to be used with headphones!). One thing to avoid is an electric guitar with a 'locking tremolo'. They are tricky to tune and really not the best choice for a beginner. If you want to play rock music then you will need an electric guitar at some point!

Any of the above guitars are fine for starting to learn the instrument. Pricewise you'll be looking at £40 - £70 for a new $\frac{3}{4}$ size acoustic guitar and £100 - £150 for a new $\frac{3}{4}$ size electric guitar. The price is virtually the same for a full size starter instrument. **I wouldn't recommend buying a guitar from a shop on the internet, eBay or from a mail order catalogue.** The best option is to go to a local guitar shop and get some advice. The local guitar shops are:

Guitar Mania in Ashley Road, Parkstone - Most people in the Poole area use Guitar Mania. They have a good selection and obviously specialise in guitars!

Absolute Music in Ringwood Road, Wallisdown - A huge music shop that sells every type of instrument. It can be a little overwhelming and impersonal for budding musicians (and parents!) but their prices and stock are excellent.

Don Strike in Westbourne Arcade - A small old-fashioned shop but they have great knowledge and some good second-hand guitars. They are also my favourite (and cheapest!) shop for guitar repairs

Music Is Life in Seabourne Road, Southbourne - Good selection and service plus they have a massive selection of ukuleles!

Oasis Music in Ringwood - Similar in size to Guitar Mania, they offer a good selection of new and used guitars. They also stock some very high end guitars and amps and offer a great service.

And finally, two other essential accessories include: a **guitar tuner** and a **soft case** for the guitar. The tuner I would recommend is the 'clip on' type as they are easy to use and start at about £5. It's really important that your child knows how to tune their instrument as an out of tune guitar isn't very inspiring to play.