

BDMA GUIDE

Woodwind Instruments: When to start

Woodwind instruments are typically picked up when children are slightly older - normally from around the age of 8. This is because unlike string instruments, they don't come in smaller sizes - it's a one size fits all job generally!

Here are some tips about what to start and when

Recorder

The recorder is the most typical instrument for most woodwind players to start on. This is because it's smaller and easy to blow and so can be taught to children from as young as 5 or 6. It uses the same fingering as flute, saxophone and oboe and so is useful if children then want to move on to one of these instruments.

Flute and Clarinet

Typically, children start learning flute and clarinet from around the age of 8. This is because by this point they are normally big enough to hold the instrument and their top two front milk teeth have been replaced with their adult teeth. This is especially important with clarinet because you place your top teeth on the mouthpiece. Sometimes these instruments are still a little big for children starting - in this case clarinet students can be recommended to get a neck strap to help hold the weight and flute students can get curved headjoints so the flute isn't so long and such a stretch to reach the keys.



Recommended: Clarinet neck strap

<https://www.reeds-direct.co.uk/clarinet/accessories/clarinet-neck-strap-by-neotech.html>

Saxophone

It isn't a given that you progress from flute/clarinet to saxophone, it's more than acceptable to stick with flute and clarinet! Often people find they pick up saxophone easier because they've got foundations in another instrument. Equally it's fine to go straight into playing the saxophone without any prior experience. People have often learnt another instrument before moving to saxophone because it is a slightly later starting age, due to the weight of the instrument. We recommend that saxophone should be started around the age of 11/12. This is purely dependant on the size of your child and whether they can hold the weight of an alto saxophone. We use neck straps to hold saxes but it is still quite a lot of weight on the neck. Typically, students begin on an alto saxophone but you can also learn soprano, tenor and baritone when you are more advanced - these are all different sizes.

Recommended: This saxophone harness distributes the weight evenly between your shoulders and core and moulds to your body shape so the saxophone feels less heavy:

<https://www.reeds-direct.co.uk/saxophone/accessories/saxholder.html>



Oboe and Bassoon

You will often find that oboe and bassoon players started learning their instruments in secondary school. This isn't a set rule but often happens due to the weight of the instruments, the difficulty of making a sound out of a double reed and just because lessons in these instruments are often more difficult to access and maybe weren't available for people in primary school. The recommended age for oboe is about age 10/11 or when they can hold the weight of the instruments. Again, having their adult teeth is best too. Bassoons are actually some of the only woodwind instruments that come in a mini size - there are some called the Ludlow Mini Bassoon that are ideal for smaller children wanting to start - because the bassoon is BIG! These mini bassoons can be used for younger children (about aged 9/10) but typically children begin bassoon lessons in secondary school.



Recommended: Go to Howarths for ready made oboe and bassoon reeds for beginners
<https://www.howarth.uk.com/>