

Finding the right size Fiddle

Finding the right fit in a violin may seem daunting at first but like Goldilocks in The Three Bears when she found the bed that was just right, there is a just right violin for you or your child.

People are often confused by violin sizing, especially since the sizes themselves can be less than intuitive to new buyers or players. A $\frac{1}{2}$ size violin for instance is not $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of a full size violin, a $\frac{1}{2}$ size violin is actually only a couple of inches shorter in total length than a full size but a few inches make a huge difference in playing. For reasons that would require a separate article to explain in detail this is a scaling system used by violin makers for instruments and you need not worry more about it unless your interested.

Parents often seem to have an innate instinct, honed over years of things being outgrown quickly to go big assuming that smaller will be outgrown too quickly. But fortunately violins although pricey are not like coats or shoes. It is quite possible, even more comfortable to learn and play a violin that is a bit “too small”. A too big violin will not only be harder to hold and play but may be impossible for smaller fingers to play properly with good technique and proper intonation. Skipping sizes is very common. Just because you start with a smaller violin does not mean that you are going to have to buy every size of violin in between as they grow.

Many very nice, lovely sounding violins come in smaller sizes and unless they are going to be playing in the symphony concert hall they simply may never truly need a full size violin whose only main benefit over fractional is their projection in large spaces (i.e. concert halls). In classical music it has become standardized that everyone 11 or 12+ plays a full size violin but traditional fiddlers have known for centuries that it isn't necessary to make beautiful music. Starting with the “pochette (pocket) fiddles” or dance fiddles that many professional dance fiddlers carried with them and played in the 17th and 18th century on up to the often indiscriminate choice of whatever they could lay their hands on for a reasonable price practice of rural and cash strapped Americans up to the present, many people have been playing on less than full size instruments for centuries (or “too big” in the case of some violas turned into violins I've met).

For measuring you need to measure or have the person who will be playing the instrument available when shopping. Teachers vary on telling people to either measure from the neck to the wrist or the neck to the center of the palm. There's a reason for this discrepancy. The wrist measurement gives the length that will be more comfortable to hold and play. The center of the palm measurement gives the length that will be the absolute maximum that the person could manage without being way too big. As you should have guessed by now, I advocate strongly for smaller, therefore I am providing the approximate neck to wrist measurements that correspond to the different size violins. A single inch makes a huge difference in playability. Full size violins should only be purchased if the person is already the size for a full size, not *almost* or *hopefully* going to be. Even if they are right on the edge, for example an 11 year old who is just barely big enough for a full size but would be more comfortable in a $\frac{3}{4}$ size, don't assume they are going to have a growth spurt.

Especially in girls it is not uncommon for them to stop growing in height around the age

that parents think they are just about to fit into a full size violin. Many boys plateau at this age as well, not getting that expected growth spurt until well into high school.

Keep in mind also that violins can be resold. With very few exceptions, well cared for violins are always able to be re-sold and usually do not lose much value if you have the patience to sell it yourself. Even the cheapest models that can barely call themselves violins are usually worth as much in parts as you paid for them. In addition, getting a well setup, descent quality instrument will prolong it's useful life. Many teachers decide that a student needs a bigger violin because they are advancing in their playing and what they really need is a better violin with people tending to shell out for a good one when it's a bigger one for a student that's not a beginner.

Petite adults should also look carefully at sizing when buying a violin, especially if it is their first and are wanting to learn. Those websites and books you may have seen telling you that *all* adults play a full size violin, their lying. Not intentionally of course but like most statements that start with *all*, it's a generalization and one that overlooks a not insubstantial number of adults who do not or should not be playing a full size violin.

Here are the approximate recommendations, measure with the arm extended with the palm up:

Violin Size Neck-Wrist Measurement

*1/64 th	11"
*1/32 nd	13"
1/16 th	15"
1/10 th	16.5"
1/8th	18"
1/4	19"
1/2	21"
3/4	22.5"
*7/8	23"
4/4(full)	24"

Violin sizes in bold type are easy to find in a wide variety of price ranges

* Uncommon, harder to find sizes but they are made and can be found

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