

Shoulder Rests

When beginning to learn the violin, younger children can get started with just a sponge pad (even a kitchen scourer will do!), secured by some elastic bands. It's a cheap, easy and straightforward way to get started.

A more elegant solution to this is a foam pad. Pre-eminent brands, such as the 'Huber Pad', offer simple, height-adjustable support for the violin on the collarbone of the shoulder. This helps the child to keep the violin in place as they play.

As your child's playing technique matures, the setup of their shoulder rest will need to be refined. The more subtle and well controlled their musical expression and technique becomes, the more stable the violin will need to be, when positioned on the collarbone.

This is where a proper shaped shoulder rest can be a really useful addition to a violinist's technique. It provides for a heightened level of adjustment and positioning.



Established brands such as Kun, Wolf, Viva and Everest offer a wide range of models. Again, the best option here is to go to a violin shop and try the different shapes and sizes, to see what offers the best balance of flexibility and stability for your child's body.

When testing shoulder rest options, consider the **slope of the shoulders** and the **slope of the upper chest**. Look for a rest that will adequately **fill the gap** between the back of the violin and the left collarbone, but without fixing the position so solidly that flexibility and freedom of movement is lost!

This decision is challenging for violinists to get right for their own playing, and even more so for someone else's! So if your child does try out different shoulder rest options, then it's important to get help and advice at a shop if you possibly can, or from your teacher.

When buying shoulder rests, it's sensible to avoid cheap imitation versions of the main brands, because the build quality is not so good. In particular, the adjustable feet of



shoulder rests will often drop off, and the rubber fittings around the feet can wear down rapidly.

This can waste a lot of time, or even end up damaging the wood of the violin, so it's best avoided. This is particularly important if you have a hire violin!

How to put a shoulder rest on

It's easy to put shoulder rests on the wrong way round! To avoid this, imagine how it will sit on your shoulder... the curve of the rest should reflect how it will sit on your collarbone, with the bottom end sloping towards the upper chest area.

If you are holding the neck of the violin in your LEFT hand, then you should place the rest on the back of the violin so that the **wider** end is on the side that will be **furthest to the left** when the violin is in playing position.

Testing Shoulder & Chin Rests: Questions To Ask

Here are some useful questions to ask your child (when they are testing a shoulder rest in playing position)...

- Are you comfortable?
- Are your arms and shoulders feeling relaxed?
- Can you move your arms freely?

Then, experiment to find out what's most comfortable...

- Try holding the violin more towards the front of the body, or more to the side
- Make sure your child is not raising their shoulders (this shouldn't happen if the rests are giving you enough support)
- Shrug the shoulders up, sigh (breathe out!), and let them fall. This is a great way to find out where your shoulders sit when they are relaxed! Then put the violin back in position.
- Bring the violin to the body, don't bring the body to the violin (avoid hunching!)
- If your child has friends of a similar height/build, ask what they find comfortable
- Don't worry if it takes a little while to find a good combination. You'll need more than 10 minutes in the back room of a shop! Keep experimenting and trying different positions.