

# HELPING YOUR CHILDREN WITH CHESS

## 1. WHY CHESS?

Studies carried out in many countries have repeatedly shown that **SYSTEMATIC STUDY OF CHESS** leads to improvement in children's educational attainment in both Maths and English.

Chess also helps children develop:

- Concentration
- Self-discipline
- Logical thought
- Planning
- Calculation
- Eye-brain co-ordination
- Visualisation
- Thinking ahead
- Considering alternatives
- Concrete analysis
- Abstract thought
- Long-range planning
- Reading skills
- Self-awareness
- Responsibility for ones own actions
- Sportsmanship
- Etiquette
- Team spirit
- Self-esteem
- Self-motivation
- Research skills
- Aesthetic judgement
- Acceptance of success and failure

... and much else besides.

It also provides opportunities for friendship with like-minded people (through joining clubs and playing in tournaments), an outlet for competitive urges, a heritage dating back hundreds of years and a literature unrivalled in its breadth and depth.

It is a game that is played in every country in the world, and can be enjoyed by everyone regardless of age, gender, race or religion.

Successful players have the chance to travel both nationally and internationally to take part in matches and tournaments. Chess provides tremendous intellectual stimulation as well as the opportunity to escape from the drudgery of everyday life into another world. Don't believe anyone who tells you chess is boring. It can be played at any speed from bullet - each player has one

minute to complete the game, to international correspondence chess, where games can last several years. And if you haven't witnessed - or experienced - the excitement of a time scramble, with both players rushing to complete the game before they run out of time, you really haven't lived. Quite simply, chess is the greatest game in the world. You owe it to your children to give them the chance to try it out for themselves.

This is why we have set up a website to help children learn chess. We hope they will enjoy using chessKIDS academy and perhaps develop a lasting interest in chess.

## 2. HOW TO HELP

Children who are enjoying learning about chess will no doubt want to be able to practice at home.

US Grandmaster Maurice Ashley, in his inspirational new book *Chess for Success*, writes: "After schoolwork and regular exercise (a healthy body makes for a sharp mind), your child might want to spend thirty minutes to three hours a day playing. Naturally, like anything else, the more chess games your child plays, the better he or she will become. However, simply playing is not the best way to improve; practice must be complemented by study. Whether it's chess books or instructional software, a daily program of concentrated learning will take a child much further than his or her peers who only play."

I would add that there should be three aspects to your child's chess work at home: playing the game, learning through lessons and solving puzzles and quizzes designed to reinforce the lessons.

Children can work on chess at home by playing against other family members, by playing against computer chess programs, by reading books or by studying on the Internet. The rest of this paper explains how parents can help their children – by playing against them, by using computer chess software or by using our chessKIDS academy website ([www.chesskids.com](http://www.chesskids.com)).

## 3. LEARNING THE RULES

Are you confident about the exact rules of castling? Have you even heard of the *en passant* rule? Does it make any difference if you start with a white or a black square in the right hand corner? Do you call the pieces that start in the corner Rooks or Castles?

Your children will be learning the correct way to play chess at school. You can brush up on the rules by downloading our simple guide to the rules of chess from

the Books section of chessKIDS academy ([www.chesskids.com](http://www.chesskids.com)) or by completing the first two classes in the Kids' Zone.

#### 4. PLAYING THE GAME

Here are a few tips which you might use when you play chess against your children.

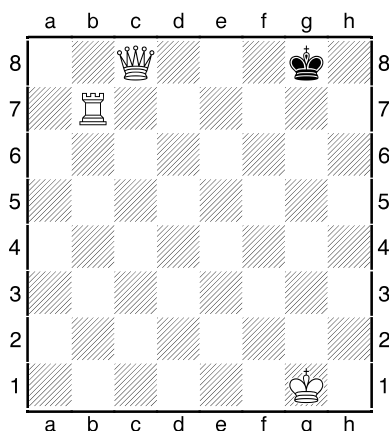
- The first time you play, play with just your King and Pawns against your child's full army. If your child beats you, add a Knight before the next game. Continue to add pieces until you find a level which gives you an equal game.
- Make a few deliberate mistakes during the game to see if your child notices. You could try saying "Oh no! My last move was a mistake!" to provide a clue.
- When you reach an easily winning position change sides so that your child gets the winning position.
- Give your child the chance to turn the board round a set number of times in each game.
- Talk through the game, explaining your moves and giving your children a chance to explain their moves. You could say things like "I'll bring my Knight out – it's good to get Knights out early in the game" or "I'm threatening your Queen – which piece do you think you should move next?"

#### 5. CHECKMATE ENDS THE GAME

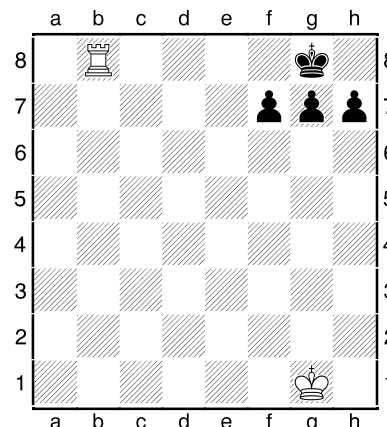
Before you can play a real game of chess you must know EXACTLY what CHECKMATE means. You also need to know the difference between CHECK, CHECKMATE and STALEMATE. All children should be able to recognise the most common CHECKMATE positions.

There are two types of CHECKMATE which occur most often.

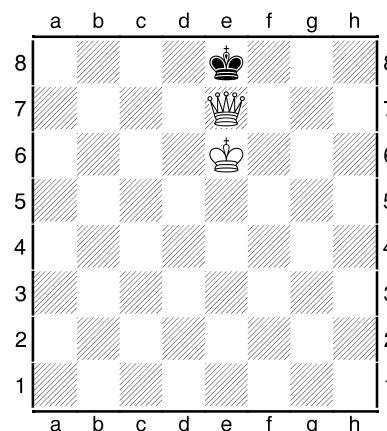
The first one is a CHECKMATE on the side of the board with a Queen or Rook. Here's one example, where a Rook stops the King escaping.



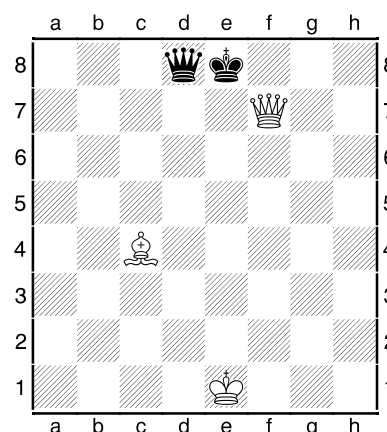
And here's another example, where the King's escape is blocked by his own Pawns.



The other type of CHECKMATE uses a Queen next to a King and defended by a friendly piece, as in this example.



Sometimes the Queen is one square diagonally away from the enemy King and his escape is blocked by another piece:



We recommend that children spend some time each week solving simple Mate in 1 move puzzles. Watch out for the Mating Machine coming shortly on chessKIDS academy.

## 6. SUPERIOR FORCE WINS

First of all you need to know the table of the values of the pieces:

PAWN	1 POINT
KNIGHT	3 POINTS
BISHOP	3 POINTS
ROOK	5 POINTS
QUEEN	9 POINTS

No value is assigned to the King because the Kings always remain on the board. (If you don't understand THAT the Kings always remain on the board, and WHY the Kings always remain on the board you have a problem!)

This is only a very rough guide. It slightly undervalues Bishops and Queens compared with other pieces. (Bishop plus Knight against Rook plus Pawn is usually a significant advantage.) Also, values can change during the game and are very much dependent on how the pieces are placed.

Having said that, in a game between two (club/tournament strength) players an advantage of just one point will often be enough to win and an advantage of two or more points almost always enough to win.

Children will often find it easy to learn the values without understanding their significance, Although a child will be able to tell me that a Knight is worth 3 points and a Rook 5 points they will refrain from exchanging a Knight for a Rook because they don't want to lose their Knight. One way to get round this problem is to ask the child if he/she would like to exchange £3 for £5. They usually understand this and can transfer this understanding to chess pieces.

You can reinforce your children's knowledge of the values of the pieces by asking how much a piece is worth when you move that piece.

## 7. ATTACKS, DEFENCES AND THREATS

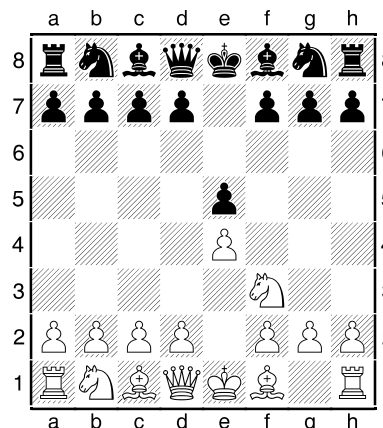
These concepts are the cornerstone of chess logic. Unless and until you understand these you can't approach playing good chess.

In its simplest terms a THREAT means a threat to deliver CHECKMATE, to capture a piece for nothing, or to capture a stronger piece with a weaker piece.

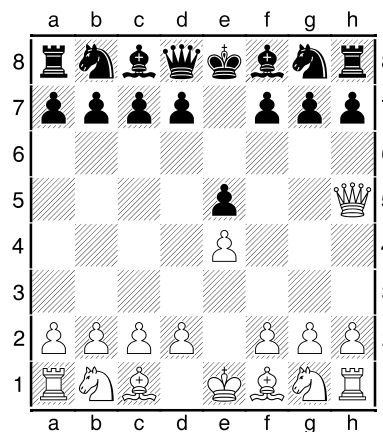
If your opponent's last move creates a THREAT you MUST either meet the THREAT or reply with an equal or greater THREAT.

A THREAT to win a piece can be DEFENDED in several ways: by moving the THREATENED piece to a safe square, by DEFENDING the THREATENED piece, by CAPTURING the piece creating the THREAT or by BLOCKING the THREAT.

Children can learn to understand THREATS by considering the simple game of Noughts and Crosses. Here, if you create a THREAT your opponent should block it. If you create a DOUBLE THREAT you will win the game. This idea, at a much higher level, is what chess is all about.

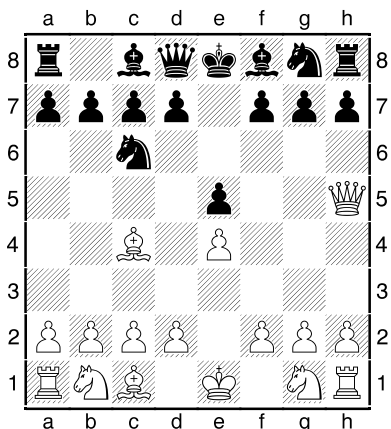


In this position White has just moved his KNIGHT to ATTACK the undefended Black Pawn on e5. This is a THREAT. Black MUST either DEFEND the THREATENED Pawn (for instance by moving his Knight from b8 to c6, or by moving his Pawn from d7 to d6) or create a THREAT himself (for instance by moving his Knight from g8 to f6).



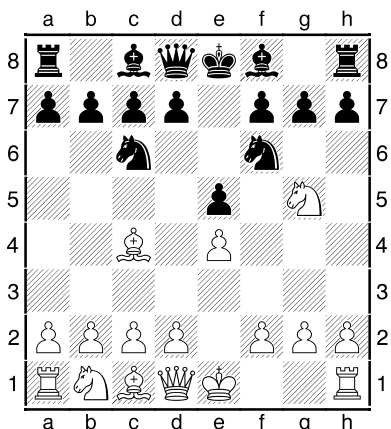
In this position White's Queen ATTACKS three Pawns: on e5, f7 and h7. The Pawns on f7 and h7 are both DEFENDED but the Pawn on e5 is not. So again Black needs to DEFEND the Pawn on e5.

Let's suppose he DEFENDS the THREATENED Pawn with his Knight, and White now DEVELOPS his Bishop.



Here's the position. White now has a DOUBLE ATTACK on the Black Pawn on f7, which is only defended once.

In fact White is THREATENING to CHECKMATE Black by moving his Queen to capture the f7 pawn. (This CHECKMATE is called SCHOLAR'S MATE.) Black can meet this THREAT in several ways, for instance by DEFENDING the Pawn by moving the Queen to e7 or f6, or by BLOCKING the Queen's path by moving the Pawn from g7 to g6.



In this (very important!) position White is again THREATENING to capture the f7 pawn. This time moving the Black Queen to e7 won't help very much. Because the Queen is more valuable than the attacking pieces White will still be able to capture on f7. The ONLY way to prevent White doing this is to BLOCK the Bishop by moving the Pawn from d7 to d5.

It follows, then, that every chess player must undertake THREE tasks every move:

a) look to see if you can get CHECKMATE, capture an UNDEFENDED piece or capture a stronger piece with a weaker piece.

- b) look to see if your opponent is THREATENING to CHECKMATE you, to capture an UNDEFENDED piece or capture a stronger piece with a weaker piece.
- c) to ensure that you do not make a move which allows your opponent to CHECKMATE you, capture an UNDEFENDED piece or capture a stronger piece with a weaker piece. (This is MUCH harder, at least for young children, than the first two.)

Experienced players who have developed a good sight of the board can do this literally within a second or two – and still not make mistakes. Inexperienced players will take much longer, and will still make frequent mistakes.

Here are some ideas about how you can reinforce these concepts when you play chess with your children:

- When you create a THREAT say “Do you see what I’m threatening?”
- When your child creates a THREAT say “I see you’re THREATENING my Bishop. Well done!” or words to that effect.
- When your child is about to play a move say “Make sure you move to a safe square”.
- Make an occasional mistake by (deliberately) moving a piece where it can be captured.
- Teach your children the acronym CCT (Checks, Captures, Threats) or CCTV (Checks, Captures, Threats, Violence) and get them to go through it during their games.

## 8. UNDERSTANDING THE OPENING

There are few things more frustrating for a chess teacher than to meet children who get the first few moves completely wrong because that's how their parents play against them at home.

Chess in its current form has been played for more than 500 years, and in that time a vast amount of information has been accumulated about the best way to play the game, much of which concerns the opening.

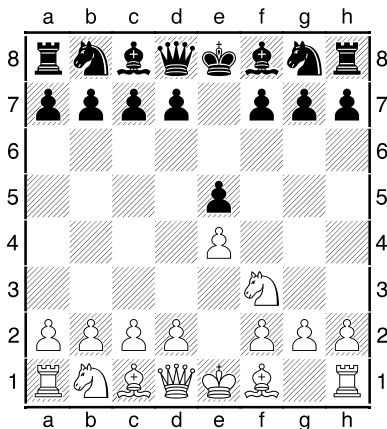
If you and your children want to get the most out of chess, and if your children want to play competitively you need to tap into that knowledge base.

First, some basic principles. As you progress you'll learn that there are many exceptions to all of these precepts, but they're a good place to start.

- You have three basic aims in the opening: to DEVELOP YOUR PIECES, to CONTROL THE CENTRE and to MAKE YOUR KING SAFE.
- The simplest way to start the game is to occupy the centre of the board with a pawn.

- Develop your Knights and Bishops as quickly as possible (usually Knights before Bishops).
- Castle early, usually on the King side, to make your King safe.
- Don't move pieces twice in the opening except to make or evade a capture.
- Don't bring the Queen out too soon, unless you can win something (or get checkmate) by doing so.
- The Rooks are the last pieces to be developed, usually only moving to occupy files vacated by pawns.
- Don't develop pieces in each other's way – instead try for a harmonious development of all your pieces.
- Don't make too many pawn moves at the start of the game. Move your two central pawns, and sometimes also your c-pawn to fight for the centre.
- Don't move your f-, g- and h-pawns in the opening – you will need those to remain unmoved to defend your King when you castle.
- Be wary about snatching pawns in the opening at the expense of development.

For some idea of how this works, return to this position.



Suppose we, wisely, decide to DEFEND our THREATENED pawn on e5. There are a number of ways of doing this. Moving the Pawn from f7 to f6 is a poor move for two reasons: it weakens the King's defences and takes the best square away from our Knight on g8. Likewise, moving the Queen from d8 to f6 brings the Queen out too soon and takes f6 away from the Knight. Moving the Queen to e7, as well as bringing the Queen out early, blocks off the Bishop on f8. While moving the Bishop from f8 to d6 blocks off the d-pawn and therefore also the Bishop on c8. This leaves two options: moving the Knight from b8 to c6 and moving the Pawn from d7 to d6. Most players prefer the former move because the pawn move blocks off the f8 Bishop's diagonal.

Over the centuries the best ways to start the game have acquired names. One way into chess culture is to learn the names of (and the history behind) the openings.

The openings most suitable for less experienced players are those in which both players start by moving their King's Pawn two squares. One reason for this is that in these openings there are fewer exceptions to the precepts listed above than in other openings. You should first of all investigate 2.Qd1-h5, because SCHOLAR'S MATE is very popular amongst young players. Once you've learned how to defend against this, move onto the openings starting with 2.Ng1-f3 (see above).

The openings we recommend you to play are:

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.Nb1-c3 Ng8-f6  
(The FOUR KNIGHTS OPENING)

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.Bf1-c4 Bf8-c5  
(The GIUOCO PIANO or ITALIAN GAME)

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.Bf1-c4 Ng8-f6  
(The TWO KNIGHTS DEFENCE)

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.Bf1-b5  
(The RUY LOPEZ or SPANISH OPENING)

1.e2-e4 e7-e5 2.Ng1-f3 Nb8-c6 3.d2-d4 e5xd4 4.Nf3xd4  
(The SCOTCH GAME)

## 9. PLAYING THE COMPUTER

If you are looking for software to teach the basic moves to young children we recommend FRITZ & CHESSTER, followed by FRITZ & CHESSTER 2. You'll find it all self-explanatory.

The software we recommend for children who would like to play chess against a computer is the CHESSMASTER series. The latest version (2004) is CHESSMASTER 10<sup>th</sup> Edition but earlier versions are available more cheaply over the Internet. (You might prefer to start with a simpler program such as Lego Chess, but in the long run you'll get far more out of using CHESSMASTER.)

Here are two ways in which you can use CHESSMASTER 10<sup>th</sup> EDITION to help both you and your children improve their game. Similar features are available in earlier editions, but the interface will differ.

Firstly, click on Play and then Training Mode. This will enable two players to play with the computer warning you if you make a mistake as well as a lot of other helpful advice.

Then, returning to the main menu, click on Play and then Ranked Play. Select Cassie, the weakest player, as your opponent and play a game. When you've finished, click on Analyze Game (1 or 2 seconds per move is adequate). Then, from the top menu, select File – Print – Move List – Auto Annotation. You will then have a printout of the game along with the computer's comments about each move. When you are confident about beating Cassie, move onto Pete, the next opponent, and continue until you find your level.

It is well worth going through the annotations together with your children to find out where you played well and where you missed opportunities to play better.

If you have a chess teacher he or she would probably also like to see the printouts of your games.

## 10. LEARNING ON THE INTERNET

Your children's chess lessons at school will be based on the chessKIDS academy website ([www.chesskids.com](http://www.chesskids.com)). Using this site at home will enable you to learn with your children and reinforce what they are learning at school.

First of all, look round the site yourself. The FAQ and Parents' pages will give you a lot of background information and advice.

Next, visit the Books section, where you can download a simple explanation of the rules of chess, coaching books for children, and a story book featuring your child's name.

If you click on 'Kids' and then 'School' you will find a series of 64 interactive chess lessons for children, grouped into nine classes. Each lesson incorporates a quiz and, upon completing each assignment successfully your children can print out a certificate. Your children could be encouraged to take these to show their chess teacher.

We recommend that, if you are not an experienced player, you go through each lesson first on your own to familiarise yourself with the material before going through it with your children.

We are now combining the lessons, quizzes and computer games to make a fully comprehensive chess course for children, incorporating the three vital components of a chess education: playing, lessons and puzzle solving. The first draft of the first stage of this was released in September 2005 and can be reached via 'Kids' and then 'chessKID!' on the top menu. There's further information via 'Grownups' and 'The chessKIDS project'.

## 11. READING AND WRITING CHESS

To a real chess player, reading and writing chess is just as important as reading and writing anything else.

Children can learn to read chess moves very easily. We use International (Algebraic) Notation, based on the co-ordinates you see in the diagrams in this paper. Children can learn to name the squares and read chess games from a book within a few minutes.

Learning to do this opens up a whole world of enjoyment and knowledge from books, newspaper and magazine articles. And if, later on, they want to write their moves down and keep a record of their games they'll be able to do so without too much trouble.

## 12. YOUR NEXT MOVE

We hope many children will want to take chess further by taking part in tournaments and other competitions. If you are in the UK you'll find links to your local chess organisation either at [www.chesskids.com](http://www.chesskids.com) or [www.rjcc.org.uk](http://www.rjcc.org.uk).

You'll also find links to national and regional chess associations from other countries on the chessKIDS academy links page.

We can advise on chess in the UK but probably can't help all that much elsewhere.