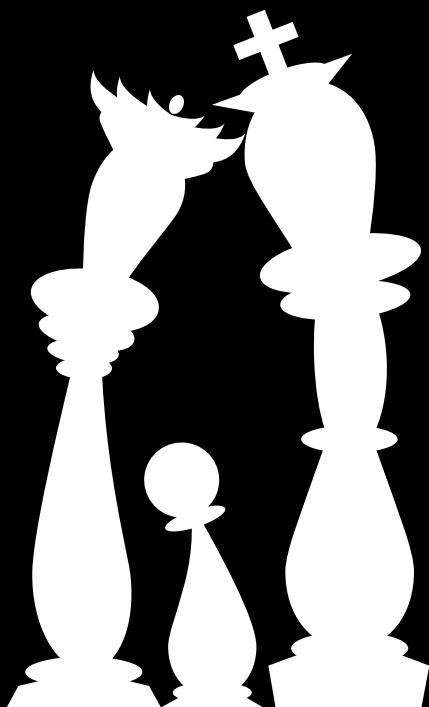


How To Teach Your Child Chess



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Contents

Introduction	4
Bishops and Rooks	8
Basic Mechanics	11
Enrollment	14
Knight Battleship	16
Open Questions	19
Patient Expectations	23
Pawn Wars	26
Incentives	28
Empathetic Boundaries	31
Basic Checkmates	34
Adaptive Instruction	36
Good Habits	40
Progressive Chess	44
Contextual Motivation	45
Sacrifice	49
What's Next?	51
Acknowledgements	52
Appendix: The Rules of Chess	53

Introduction

My dad taught me chess when I was six years old. I don't remember much, except that it felt boring and complicated.

My dad wasn't very fun to play with. He would take my pieces and I felt I was always making a mistake. After momentary interest engaging in the new activity, I quickly became irritable and frustrated, wanting to do other things. Video games were much more fun for me.

Learning chess at a young age did not enhance my intelligence or benefit me in any way, except one: I was able to play the game with friends during indoor recess in middle school.

As peers, we discovered the joys of tactical combinations. We furiously tried to attack and checkmate each other in the first few moves. We paired up to learn the fast-paced team variant, bughouse. None of us knew

what we were doing, but suddenly, the game became fun.

Once I was engaged in playing, and wanted to come up with new strategies to beat my friends, I was ready and excited to join the chess team in high school. I went from novice to expert, reading dozens of chess books and playing in rated tournaments.

And so, like the great World Champions and their professional grandmaster peers, I became a chess player. Not because of my early years but rather in spite of them.

Kids all over the world associate chess with the first experience, the dull pain, rather than the second, the playful learning. It's so easy to get frustrated or bored at the start, when someone is telling you a bunch of arbitrary piece movements.

Folks understandably stop short, thinking that improving at chess is laborious and unrewarding. As adults, they continue feeling disinterested and vaguely incompetent.

This book tackles the problem by providing a framework for learning chess that's engaging and empowering from the start. We completely bypass the boring frustration by equipping you with intuitive learning tools.

The key idea is to play simplified chess minigames. After five minutes with chapter 1, you can jump right in to fun, highly instructive interactions with your kids!

This method doesn't sacrifice rigor; we will remain laser focused on teaching the core themes and basic skills which make chess a universal metaphor for strategic thinking.

I developed the chapters to come through much trial and error teaching hundreds of students across the country, from pre-K infants to reluctant retirees. In addition to teaching directly, I've also helped parents and other chess instructors effectively employ these ideas with their kids.

It turns out that making chess curriculum fun and intuitive is essential, but really only

half the battle. So each minigame chapter is followed by a teaching method and a parenting principle. These are essential tips and tricks, sometimes only indirectly related to chess, that will greatly help your child feel motivated to progress in their learning.

A couple notes on chapter structure before we dive in. First, each chapter is self-contained, so jump around as you like. Second, the book focuses on the overall teaching framework, not the rules of chess.

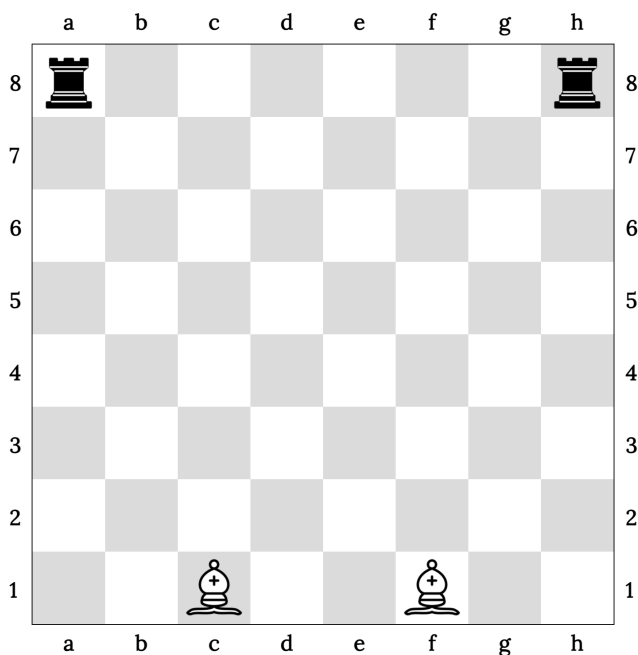
If you aren't familiar with the names of chess pieces and how they move yet, no problem, but you may want to glance at the rules in the appendix first, then jump to the first teaching method on basic piece mechanics before returning to the first minigame. This will be useful for readers who want more confidence in their chess knowledge before going through the minigames with their kids.

On behalf of the child whose life you will soon change, thank you for taking this time to become a great chess teacher. Enjoy!

Minigame 1

Bishops and Rooks

White moves a bishop first, then black moves a rook, then white moves a bishop, and so on. The winner is whoever captures one of the opponent's pieces first.



Initial setup. Notice a1 square is black.

If nobody has captured a piece after 50 moves each, the game ends in a draw. For many children, getting that far often takes weeks. No need to keep count for the first few games.

Even if a child has played chess before, this minigame can be used as a diagnostic tool. Players who consistently miss opportunities or lose are encouraged to continue playing before moving on to the next minigame. Quick learners (especially adults) may find the game too obviously easy and boring, ready to move on after one or two rounds. That's OK too.

As you play, remember that the minigame is the teacher! Get your child in the habit of making a move *of her own volition and committing to it*. No eye contact approval, no “uh ah” warnings, no head shaking, no judgment. It's healthy for chess learners to make their own mistakes and learn from them. Switch colors and try again! Be patient, just play.

Eventually, you may set up certain instructive positions (double attack opportunity) and ask the student to point out the best next move. This is especially good after the first week of teaching second graders, for example, once they're engaged in the play and want to improve.

As an optional rule, you may enforce touch move: if you touch a piece you have to move it. When you release the piece your turn ends. The only exception is to say "I adjust" prior to touching and fixing a piece.

Starting with Bishops and Rooks is the fastest and most concrete way to teach the most basic skill in chess: "think before you move."

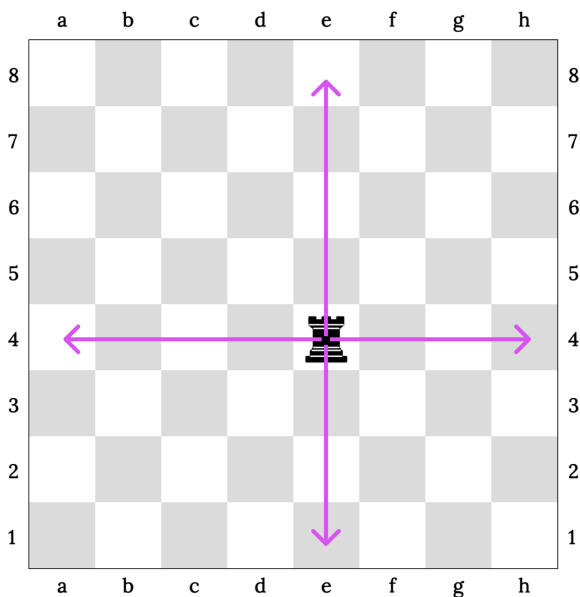
In the next chapter, we will explore how to teach the movement of the pieces. Feel free to skip if you and your child are fully familiar with the various piece movements.

Teaching Method 1

Basic Mechanics

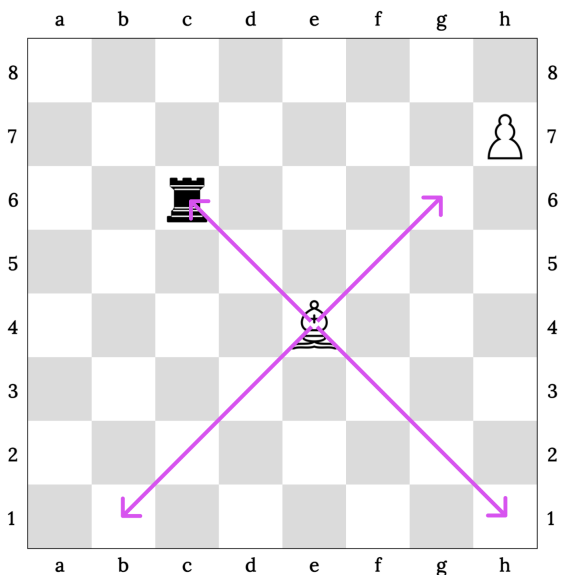
How do the pieces move? Rather than demonstrating each piece (see appendix), here we focus on how to teach a beginner.

First, we want to expose the learner to the piece. Place it on an empty board and demonstrate: “This is the rook, it looks like a castle. It moves vertically and horizontally.”



Next, invite the student to move the piece around. This is an opportunity to familiarize them with coordinates. “Is it legal for a rook to move from b1 to c8? Would you please move the rook from f7 to c3 in two moves?”

Now that the student has tried movement, we need to explain capturing. “Pieces that move in straight lines cannot jump over their teammates—they have to stop short. To take an opponent’s piece, move into the square occupied and remove the other piece from the board.”



Set up a few obstacle courses and have the student practice legal moves. For example, place the bishop on e4 and opponent pieces on c6, a2, h3. Place a friendly knight on d5. Moving only the bishop, how many moves does it take to capture all the enemy pieces? Have your child just try it!

Teaching piece movement can take as long as you like. I recommend keeping the training session short. Kids usually prefer “let’s play a game” to “solve this arbitrary puzzle.” The minigames will naturally teach and reinforce piece movement rules.

Kids appreciate fun, inventive language. For example, you could introduce bishops as “X-men” or explain how Catholic leaders wear pointy hats with diagonal cuts. I worked with an instructor in St. Louis, Queen Thomas, who sang a memorable jingle as she demonstrated rooks: “up, down, side-to-side, up-down-side-to-side.”

Especially with young children, every second is a valuable opportunity to captivate.

Parenting Principle 1

Enrollment

There are many tactics we can employ to momentarily attract kids' interest, but long-term, we need their goodwill and buy-in. How can we get on the same team?

I wasn't on team chess when my dad taught me the pieces movements by rote. I was much more invested, years later, when chess became a fun competition among friends.

The most powerful and natural motivator is to play for the sake of play. Because you can. Because it's interesting and enjoyable.

Kids don't practice piano to win trophies at recitals, they don't do ballet or hockey to eventually earn millions as lucky pros, and they don't study chess to put line items on their resume or to get into a famous college.

They might, eventually, after hearing it ten thousand times from someone else. And they

might want to win your short-term approval or avoid punishment. But these are hollow drives which utterly fail when battling against playful discovery that's interesting, challenging, and incrementally rewarding.

This is especially true with chess. It's a hard game to learn and an easy one to feel bored or insecure playing. Anything other than an encouraging smile, a gentle guiding hand, and a playful attitude might breed resentment. It's bound to be a disaster if we start with the full, complex, confusing game.

Throughout any learning journey, we want to inspire. We want the student to become engaged, to ask questions, to take initiative.

Being on the same team means that when someone really doesn't want to play, we don't force it. Give them other options and a hug. Let them know to come back when ready.

Having a choice is a prerequisite to enrollment. And enrollment is a prerequisite to learning *and retaining* anything at all.

Minigame 2

Knight Battleship

Starting with an empty chess board, each player holds a knight and three pawns of their color. Players take turns placing...

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The must-read guide for anyone teaching chess to beginners.

Chess is one of those incredible bonding opportunities—like cooking, swimming, or riding a bike—that your child will remember for life.

Unfortunately, chess is hard, so most folks screw it up. Kids are pushed in the opposite direction, forever finding chess complicated and boring.

This book explains 15 simple, impactful ideas to ensure a positive chess experience for your family. It's structured to be interactive, rigorous, and very digestible.

In less than five minutes with chapter 1, you will be engaged in the first fun minigame: Bishops + Rooks. Get ready to explore key chess fundamentals by playing together and having a great time!

Coach Andy has taught hundreds of kids to love chess. He's delighted to share his hard-earned stories and essential lessons for making chess easy, intuitive, and educational for beginners of all ages. More on the author at andytrattner.com/about.



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