

Information for parents of young chess players

by Grandmaster Alex Baburin, Senior FIDE Trainer

Benefits of chess

Chess helps to develop the following useful qualities:

- Strategic thinking & planning
- Concentration and the ability to stay focused
- Learning to cope with problems (defeats, etc) and pressure (time trouble, tense games)

The first point is usually mentioned when people talk about the benefits of chess, however in my opinion points 2 and 3 are more important. One of the biggest challenges I see is that young players tend to play very fast, seemingly unable to slow down. When I tell them to take their time, they all agree to do it – and 2 minutes later they do exactly the opposite!

Defeats in chess are very painful as there is no one to blame but oneself. This teaches a young player to cope with a loss. Tense situations (important games or time trouble) which are quite frequent in chess, also teach young players to deal with stress. Finally, chess allows social interactions as players meet and bond with each other at various tournaments.

What young player need to study	What young player spend time on
Tactics	Solving puzzles
Strategy	Playing online (i.e. blitz)
Calculation	Openings
Openings	
Endgames	
History (i.e. games of great players)	
Analysis of own games	
Practical skills (i.e. psychology)	
Chess etiquette	

Useful Chess Tools

Books

Chess literature is vast, but a young player does not need too many books to begin with. I recommend a great series by English chess publisher Gambit. There are 10 books in this series:

1. 'How to beat Your Dad at Chess'
2. 'Chess Tactics for Kids'
3. 'Chess Puzzles for Kids'
4. 'Chess Openings for Kids'
5. 'Chess Endgames for Kids'
6. 'Chess Strategy for Kids'
7. 'Chess Openings Trap for Kids'
8. 'Chess Opening Workbook for Kids'
9. 'Chess Endgame Workbook for Kids'
10. 'Chess Tactics Workbook for Kids'

I'd say that a beginner needs No 1, intermediate players need No 1-3, while advanced players need No 1-6. The remaining 4 titles are optional.

Ideally, a young player should start building a small library, which should include books on the following subjects:

- Tactics (puzzle collections)
- Openings (general)
- Strategy
- Endgame
- Game collections of famous players (like Carlsen and Anand)
- Specific openings (those which he/she plays – that is for advanced players)

Internet & Computer Resources

YouTube

There are hundreds of chess videos on YouTube. I'd like to mention three chess channels which I find very useful:

Gotham Chess: <https://www.youtube.com/@GothamChess>

Chess Vibes: <https://www.youtube.com/@ChessVibesOfficial>

PowerPlayChess: <https://www.youtube.com/@PowerPlayChess>

The latter is by Grandmaster Daniel King, it probably suits mostly advanced players.

Playing Arenas/Portals

There is no shortage of these. I'd like to mention three: chesskid.com, chess.com and lichess.org The first one is designed with children in mind – one can get free membership and limited access to numerous lessons, videos and quizzes. For \$49 a year you get gold membership, with unlimited access to all lessons, videos and puzzles. During the pandemic several of my students made great progress using CK.

Chess.com and lichess.org would suit older players more. Chess.com is the world's most popular chess portal, while it's free rival lichess.org is probably a close second.

Online Publishers

I'd like to mention two: ChessPublishing.com (<https://www.chesspublishing.com/content/>) focuses on the openings, while Chessable (<https://www.chessable.com/>), which is becoming very popular, has chess videos about all aspects of the game. Both sites would be of most benefit to advanced players.

Useful Chess Websites

The Week in Chess (<https://theweekinchess.com/>) – chess news and free download of about 4,000 high-quality games each week! The man behind this site, Mark Crowther, also sells a database with all previous years, it's worth considering!

ChessBase (<https://en.chessbase.com/>) – news, analysis and great chess products (ChessBase, MegaBase, Fritz, etc)

FIDE.com (www.fide.com) – official website of the International Chess Federation – news, calendar, ratings, etc.

ICU website (www.icu.ie) – news, calendar, tournament reports and ratings. The ICU also runs a coaching program for top juniors.

Computer Programs

In chess there is a popular format called PGN (Portable Game Notation), which can be read by any chess program. Users of chesskid.com, chess.com and lichess.org get access to programs which can work with PGN and which in fact create PGN databases (for example, of your games played online). They also provide access to chess engines – programs which can analyse and evaluate chess positions with great accuracy.

Chess engines include Fritz, which has its own interface and can work with game databases. Another program is Stockfish, probably the strongest engine around. It's free, but it needs a host program (like ChessBase or Fritz).

ChessBase is a great program used by most chess professionals in the world. I use it for entering, storing and annotating my own games, researching my opponents and studying all aspects of the game – from the opening to the endgame. One needs a good database to go with it. The best is MegaBase. These products are not cheap – ChessBase 17

(latest version) is €150, while MegaBase 2023 is €200. There is a combination of two, available at €300:

https://shop.chessbase.com/en/products/chessbase_17_mega_package

When buying ChessBase products, I'd focus on these two – there are lots of other products, but CB and Mega is the most important. Also, I won't upgrade them every 1-2 years, no need in that, especially if you also download free games from TWIC.

Curiously, access to free tools at chess.com and lichess.org has created a situation when even very strong junior players nowadays are less familiar with ChessBase than their counterparts of 10-15 years ago – and they don't benefit from using ChessBase as much as they should!

Coaching

Working with a chess coach can be very beneficial for a young player. There is no shortage of chess trainers in the world. Their chess strength, coaching experience and fees charged vary a lot. It's best to do your own online research and make sure your child is comfortable working with a particular coach. I reckon that a lesson every 2-3 weeks is a OK, though more frequent sessions would be more beneficial. A good coach would advise the student on what should be studied between sessions – most of the work should be done by the student himself/herself!

Tournaments and ratings

The main tournaments in Ireland are Bunratty Festival (mid Feb), Gonzaga Classic (late Jan), Kilkenny Congress (late Nov), Galway Congress (mid March), to name but a few. Usually there are 6 rounds – one of Friday night, three on Saturday and two on Sunday. Often one can take a bye (draw without playing) in round 1, making it a two-day event. For more details, refer to <https://www.icu.ie/events>

Rating is a number which shows how strong/successful a player is – when you do well, your rating goes up and vice versa. Irish starting rating is 700. Usually, one needs to play 2-3 rated tournaments before getting a published rating. For young players it can change very fast due to high K-factor (a multiplier for rating changes). Ratings are important for determining which section one can enter in a tournament and selection for various events (i.e. international junior tournaments). Most online arenas offer their own ratings, but I wouldn't worry about those – only official ratings (ICU and FIDE) matter.

Cheating in Chess

It is rather easy to cheat in chess, especially online – all one needs is a device with access to a chess engine – then the program actually plays the game, while the player simply transmits the moves, ‘winning’ games! Alas, some children discover this ‘strategy’ and use it. Parents are usually shocked when they learn of this...

Needless to say, such cheating not only corrupts the perpetrator, but it also poisons the game as other players quickly realise what's happening and may start doing the same! Fortunately, it's easy to detect cheating – either with the use of special software or ‘manually’. I have a ‘zero tolerance’ policy to online cheating, banning for a few months anyone who is engaged in it.

Main Challenges

Young players face many challenges, such as what openings to play, which tournaments to choose, how to get/improve rating, etc.

However, I think that the main challenges are quite different – it's how to slow down and think longer and how to study chess.

Study Chess with GM Alex Baburin

I run monthly tournaments for juniors, usually in two sections. The next tournament will take place in St Conleth's College on the 22nd of April. Usually I give a short masterclass at such tournament and also have a chess stall with books for juniors. For more information and to register for this event, use our online form:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdDvYFpqiC_ti65l9plbeRFrrsP-al84zZEXpilKEfVnHMycA/viewform

I also run weekly online classes – the next 7-week term starts on the 17th of April. For details and to sign up, visit

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfHeA7XOtNb2RlioZh7w4VjbA0Ya7C6gTkibIP6feLytu7ELg/viewform>

There is a junior chess club, which I run on Tuesdays (from 19:00 to 20:00) in Mount Merrion community centre. The next 8-week term starts on the 18th of April. At present, there are a few places left. For details, see

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLScysN3mhH1UtDfIVrXH69su4HfxyFbjFsdibrjMOcDWLxvGTg/viewform>

I've already mentioned our club on www.chesskid.com – I offer CK gold membership at reduced rate and access to our weekly online tournaments.

I regularly run camps, both online and in-person. The most recent camps were Easter online camp (3-6 April) and Easter camp in St Michael's College (11-14 April), attended by 27 and 52 students respectively. I'll run two camps this summer, dates will be fixed soon.

Finally, I give individual chess lessons, either in person or on Zoom. The current rate is €65 an hour.

If you want to be informed about all these activities, please join our mailchimp mailing list at <https://www.alexbaburinchess.com/chess-school/>