

# When Kids Learn Chess . . . .

## They Learn Life!

It would be easy to give you a list of all the benefits associated with teaching kids to play Chess. Hundreds of studies are available from all over the world that show the positive results achieved by teaching Chess to children. But, would a litany of words and short phrases describing those benefits really mean much to you? Probably not, so instead of filling up the next two pages with a list of meaningless terms let's just discuss the subject as it relates to changing kids lives.

Teachers and parents both will tell you kids who play Chess have better **focus** and **concentration** skills. Children diagnosed with ADD & ADHD benefit even more. Carrie Joyce, the Chess club sponsor at Montgomery Central High School will tell you that one of her students is ADHD and had trouble sitting still for more than a few seconds or paying attention to one thing for even that long. Now that he is in the Chess program, he has developed the ability to concentrate on the Chess game and this has enabled him to focus more efficiently on his studies as well. He no longer disrupts the class as much and his grades have improved because he has learned to focus his attention and concentrate his perceptive skills on the subject at hand. Once this **enhanced mental discipline** is mastered it will continue to grow and develop throughout his life. Applying this **more organized and efficient** mind to all aspects of his life will become as natural as breathing, making it easier for him to achieve his goals and dreams. Is there anyone who wouldn't want that for his or her child?

Chess also provides children a chance to develop **logical** and **analytical** thinking processes, which become more automatic over time and even intuitive as experience increases. It's been said that; "Experience is something you don't get until just after you need it." Each Chess game a child plays provides them with a myriad of experiences, some they've seen before and some they haven't. Every game is different. The point is a child learns to incorporate this

experience into his next game of Chess. Repetition of this practice allows the child to develop the ability to assimilate all their life experiences and apply them to their related endeavors in a logical and analytical manner. A person with this skill is someone who can reach out and grab life by the horns and make something of what they get.

Hand in hand with Chess comes the necessity to learn that **actions have consequences** and that one must **accept responsibility for ones own actions**. Chess players learn quickly that poor play is punished and good play is rewarded. This concept is deeply ingrained in children who play Chess because the reward and punishment occur quickly after the action that led to the consequence. Psychologists have known for a long time that “instant gratification” is one of the strongest motivators in human nature. Using this technique Chess teaches children they are solely responsible for their own actions and that those actions have consequences. Children who grasp this concept take a giant leap toward **maturity**, and one more step toward a richer and more fulfilled life.

When children learn their actions result in consequences, whether good or bad, they begin to develop an improved sense of **self-discipline**. They discipline themselves to achieve the rewards and they discipline themselves to avoid the punishments. When self-discipline is established in youth it becomes a mainstay in life. Self-discipline helps one master difficult obstacles and achieve higher goals. To be able to carry this trait with you throughout life is a tremendous gift.

Another important self-improvement trait that kids receive from learning to play Chess is a heightened sense of **self-esteem**. Chess is a wonderful equalizing activity. It is something that any child can learn to do. It doesn't matter about a child's IQ, or if the child is athletic, or popular or handicapped, or hyperactive, or what have you. They can all learn Chess and benefit by doing so. But the students who aren't popular or athletic, or geniuses cease to feel any inferiority over the Chessboard. They can win or lose just as many games as any other child. They become equalized with their peers, and when that happens their self-esteem blossoms. With self-esteem comes the ability to believe in one's self, which in turn

builds **self-confidence**. You'd be hard pressed to find anyone who'd argue that helping children build self-esteem and self-confidence is a bad thing.

When a child's self-esteem and self-confidence are bolstered they begin to develop **self-respect**. Self-respect is a building block of good **sportsmanship** and a necessary component in the ability to learn to respect others. By nature Chess competition is a one on one enterprise. This characteristic of the game makes it very easy for a child to learn to respect their opponent. A healthy respect for themselves and their opponents gives kids the mental framework to form an appropriate attitude of good sportsmanship. Once in place this attitude will serve them well all through their lives.

Improved **memory** is another benefit that children acquire by learning to play Chess. Memory is established through repetition. Children see the same patterns develop again and again on the Chessboard and they remember them even when they occur in different situations. The focus and concentration developed from playing Chess contributes to an enhanced capability for **pattern recognition**, which in turn helps to build memory. There are several software packages available for Chess training, which solely rely upon developing pattern recognition as one of the basic learning tools needed to master Chess. Pattern recognition ability is not limited to Chess. It occurs in many facets of life. Numbers are a good example. In math, numbers tend to behave according to set parameters (*i.e. patterns*) that are readily recognizable when one is aware of them. It doesn't matter which field of mathematics one is endeavoring to learn, algebra, geometry, calculus, the patterns are there, and those with the ability to recognize them catch on faster and perform better. Enhanced memory and pattern recognition ability will aid children in many areas of their lives, even after they grow into adults.

Computers are a part of our lives now, and they are an even bigger part of our children's world. We've all heard of Chess matches between humans and computers that have been programmed and designed to play Chess. Because of the world of microprocessor computers can calculate the best response to any Chess position that occurs on the board in a matter of seconds, even less sometimes. But no matter how good computers can

become at Chess there are several things they cannot do that kids can. Chess teaches kids **creativity, innovation, and anticipation**. Chess helps kids use their imaginations. **Imagination** is the birthplace of creativity. Computers do not create, they do not innovate, they do not anticipate. They can only respond because they have no imaginations. Think what a dreary world we would live in if children had no imaginations, and therefore couldn't be creative, or innovative, or learn to anticipate and imagine a response to possible situations that might occur in their lives. If all children could do is react, they would never be able to achieve beyond their current capabilities. By stimulating imagination and giving creativity and innovation a place to thrive Chess teaches kids how to grow and expand their capabilities.

On the Chessboard children learn through imagination, anticipation, and innovation, how to **create opportunities**. In Chess they can look for ways to create an opportunity that works to their advantage, or find an opportunity that allows their opponent to make a mistake. This works in reverse also, if a child fails to see an opportunity that their opponent has created they may fall into a trap and suffer the consequences. So, a child must learn to see both the possibilities they can create themselves as well as the possibilities that are being created in relation to them. The ability to recognize an opportunity and take advantage of it, or to see a threat created by some external force and avoid it is one of the most useful life skills any child can learn, and chances are they will learn it on a Chessboard.

In order for a child to develop the ability to see opportunities and recognize threats they must learn to exercise **patience**. Patience is one of the best weapons any Chess player can have in their arsenal. It allows the player the time necessary to evaluate the board and employ all the skills they have acquired in finding the best play. Everyone has heard the saying "Patience is a virtue." Kids need virtue too, and Chess is one way to bring out patience in children.

Even though Chess teaches kids an abundance of life skills, (*and by no means have they all been mentioned here*) children still require an education to succeed in life. Well, guess what! Chess helps with that too. Remember all those studies that were

mentioned in the beginning, they all have similar findings. Chess helps kids achieve superior academic performance. The United States Chess Federation has a slogan; “Chess Makes Kids Smart.”

Chess aids in the development and expansion of **critical thinking** skills and boosts **deductive and inductive reasoning** prowess. Every move on a Chessboard requires the player to examine the critical aspects of the position, **assign priorities** to different options, and use reasoning to arrive at a solution to the problem before making a move. Since children have to make their move before the game can continue they learn quickly to analyze the position, prioritize their options, and choose a reasoned response in a relatively short period of time. Since Chess is so entertaining and engrossing, the kids don't even realize all the skills they are using in this decision making process, and they are required to do it over and over again and again during a game that it becomes an ingrained habit in their minds without them even being aware they have learned to do it. This subconscious training then manifests itself whenever a child is confronted with a problem to solve, whether it is math, or science, or any other subject. The skills are there and the child taps into them without consciously thinking about what they're doing. They are just exhibiting **enhanced problem solving** skills without realizing where they acquired those skills. Kids who learn Chess just perform better academically.

This improved academic success serves to increase a child's self-esteem even more, as well as advance their **intellectual maturity**. Another sign of maturity, both personal and intellectual is the ability to **plan ahead and foresee consequences**. Chess enhances this ability in children because they constantly have to analyze and reevaluate the position on the board before each move. Those players that make a plan and attempt to carry it out while avoiding pitfalls become better players, better students, and better people, and Chess helped teach them how.

Chess teaches kids that **hard work is rewarded by success**. If they learn the game and study to become better at the game then they win more games and that leads to winning in competitions. Taking home a trophy they won based on their own skill, which they developed over time by studying and practicing gives a child a

sense of accomplishment (*i.e. enhanced self-confidence*) that will carry over into other aspects of their lives, such as academics. If hard work pays off in Chess, it will also pay off in academics.

The spatial nature of Chess allows children to develop their sense of **spatial-relations**. Spatial-relations is an area that crosses several fields of studying school and in life. Students with good spatial-relations do better in art and drawing classes as well as geometry and trigonometry, not to mention drafting and graphic layout and design. Skills in spatial-relations can be an advantage in fields like cartography, architecture, warehousing, and many other occupations. Chess provides kids a fun and entertaining forum in which to exercise their spatial abilities.

The beauty of Chess is that it stimulates children's minds and helps them build all of these skills while enjoying themselves. It is true that children can learn many of these same skills through other activities such as sports or music. But, none of them assist children in as many other academic areas as Chess. Being good at tennis doesn't necessarily make you better in art. Playing football doesn't mean you'll do any better in algebra. Chess teaches skills that are far reaching and crosses many fields of endeavor, more so than any other activity during the school day. Educators call this "cross-curricular."

This cross-curricular feature of Chess makes it an ideal activity for any school system, whether it is public, private, or home schooled. Yet, with all of this known data available, school systems in the United States are still hesitant, if not resistant, to implementing Chess programs.

Chess develops and enhances a myriad collection of life skills that combine to make children grow into better adults and gives them basic building blocks to excel in school as well as their chosen professions.

There's no doubt about it. Children who learn Chess learn life!

