

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How do I know when my child is ready for that first tournament?

A: When your child asks to play in a tournament, it's probably time! Perhaps she's been inspired by an older sibling or a classmate. The basic requirements are:

- knowing what the chess pieces are and how they move around the board
- understanding how to play a basic game (learning to play pawn games is an excellent place to start)
- knowing how to win, lose, or draw a game (be able to identify checkmate)

While it's helpful for review purposes for each player to write down the game moves, it's not essential until the child is more experienced and can play a basic game well. Once a player is in 3rd grade, an experienced player is expected to record the games on a chess pad for coaches or tournament personnel to review. In rated events it may be required for 4th grade and up.

Q: Does a parent need to be present at the tournament if the child will be playing in another room most of the time?

A: Yes, if the child is of elementary school age. If the kids are young middle school students, parental presence is strongly advised. The tournament personnel are mostly volunteers who are quite occupied with running the tournament efficiently and on schedule, and they cannot take responsibility for supervising the kids outside of the tournament hall. Parents often coordinate with each other to carpool and to alternate supervisory responsibility during the day, especially for school team events.

Q: What should my child bring to a tournament? Will food be available for purchase?

A: Ideally, each player should bring a portable chess set for practice between rounds; a book, small toy, or electronic device for use between rounds; a football, small ball, or Frisbee for outside play between rounds, provided the venue has an outdoors facility available (such as at a school); water, healthy snacks, and perhaps a lunch. Most scholastic tournament host sites sell pizza and snacks on-site, but it's a good idea to bring something of your own. It's important for the kids to eat and drink a little something between rounds! As in any sport, kids do become dehydrated, and water and non-sugary foods will help them maintain their concentration.

Q: My child can't play all rounds in a full day tournament due to a scheduling conflict. What can we do?

A: Sometimes kids do have a birthday party, family event, or a significant athletic competition that prevents them from playing in all rounds of a chess tournament. Fortunately, the "bye" option allows them to miss a round or two of

chess so that they can meet both obligations in the same day. A “bye” is an excused absence from a round that, depending on the rules for that particular tournament, gives either a half point (same as in a draw) or zero points for the missed round. The request for one or two byes for the particular rounds must be provided before pairings are up for the first round. Missing a round otherwise is to be automatically considered a “no show” and will be a forfeit of the game and withdrawal from tournament.

Q: How does scoring for trophies work? And how do I know if my child has a chance to win a trophy?

A: The nice thing about chess is that kids can accumulate more trophies more quickly than by playing on a sports team! Trophies are awarded for the top scoring players within each section and many tournaments present ribbons or other small tokens to participants, especially those playing in the K-1 section. A win is worth 1 point, a draw is worth ½ point, and a loss (or resignation) allots no points. Byes are worth ½ or zero points, depending on the rules of that particular tournament (stated on its registration). Typically, if your child has 3.5 points or better at the end of a 5 round tournament, there’ll be a trophy waiting!

Q: I see that trophies are awarded for plus scores. What’s a plus score?

A: A plus score is attained when a player wins a majority of his games. Most tournaments recognize a score of 3 (and higher) after 5 rounds a plus score. Remember, two draws (worth a half point each) translate to one full point!

Q: How soon are tournament results posted and ratings updated?

A: Allow a few days for results to be posted, particularly for larger tournaments. The GCA relies solely on its volunteers who need time to recover from planning, setting up, running and closing a tournament. Chess ratings can be found by going to the US Chess Federation website: www.uschess.org.

Q: I have heard that some of the top kids take private chess instruction. How can I find a chess coach?

A: Many players improve their game by meeting once a week or so with a private coach to review their games, teach specific game openings and closings, or devise new game strategies. Check with your child’s school chess teacher or coach for recommendations. Also, there are local chess clubs and businesses that teach chess to children in groups and individual settings. Most scholastic tournaments are organized and run by chess coaches, so ask around!

Q: How does a chess club work? Do I have to pay to play?

A: Most chess clubs are free and the only requirement is to show up to play! Chess clubs provide plenty of opportunity for extra practice and a great way to try out new strategies and tactics before a tournament.

Q: Why should a child play on a school team? How is team play different than individual competition?

A: Playing on a school team is fun! Some scholastic tournaments, like the State Qualifier and State Championship tournaments, are only for school teams. Camaraderie, friendship, mutual support, and the excitement of presenting a hard-won team trophy to your school's principal or headmaster can't be beat!

Q: What about home-schoolers or independent study kids? How can we participate in team tournaments?

A: Create your own team! Check with the Tournament Director of the team tournament you're considering for specific rules and regulations.