How to teach kids chess: one piece at a time

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How to teach a child chess one piece at a time, starting with the pawn game, with mini-games for each piece, the first checkmates, a daily puzzle and a free chess clock.

Teach chess one piece at a time. Start with only the pawns (the first to reach the far side wins), add one kind of piece when the last is easy, and play the full game only when a child knows all six. Most children are ready for a whole game after a few weeks of ten-minute sessions. Peabody's Chess has a puzzle a day, a computer to play, twenty openings and a chess clock, free through the end of 2026.

Week by week

1. The pawn game. Pawns only. Move forward, capture diagonally, first to the far side wins.
2. Add the rooks. Straight lines. The rook guards its pawns.
3. Add the bishops. Diagonals; each stays on its colour.
4. Add the queens. A rook and a bishop in one.
5. Add the knights. The L-shaped jump. Practise touring the board.
6. Add the kings, and check. Now it's chess.

The guide to how the pieces move has each one in plain words for a child to read.

The first checkmates

Before openings, teach a child to finish a game: king and queen against a lone king, then king and rook. Set them up and practise. A child who can't checkmate will draw games they've won.

Little and often

- Ten minutes a day beats an hour on Sunday.
- Do the puzzle of the day together; puzzles train the eye.
- Let them play the computer on an easy level.
- Win some, lose some. Children learn little from always winning or always losing.

When to use a chess clock

Once a child can play a whole game, a clock adds excitement and teaches them to think while their own time runs. Start slow: 15 minutes each plus 10 seconds a move is generous. Peabody's chess clock runs on one phone between two players; tap your side after you move.

The three opening rules

Control the center, develop knights and bishops, castle early. The ten best openings for beginners all follow them; the Italian Game is the usual first one. And when it's time to rest the brain, Peabody's library has stories at every level.

A ten-minute session

1. Two minutes: one puzzle together. Ask "what does the other side threaten?" before you look for a move.
2. Five minutes: a mini-game with the pieces you're learning, or a fast game if you're past that stage.
3. Three minutes: set up one position from the game and ask "what else could you have done here?"

That's it. Short sessions keep it fun, and the "what else" question is how children start to think a move ahead.

When they start beating you

Celebrate. Then find new challenges: the puzzle of the day gets harder as their rating climbs, the computer has higher levels, and a local club or a school chess team gives them opponents their own age. The Chess directory lists the national federation, which can point you to scholastic tournaments.

Questions grown-ups ask

What age can a child start chess?

Many children learn the moves around five or six, and the pawn game works even younger. The right age is when they enjoy it.

I don't play chess. Can I still teach it?

Yes: learn each piece a step ahead of your child. The chess tips for beginners cover what most beginners need.

Is online chess safe for kids?

Peabody's chess has no chat and no strangers: the opponent runs on your device. Other sites do have chat; the Chess directory says which have a kid mode.

How do I keep track of my child's progress?

Peabody's my rating page keeps a games log and any official rating on your device, so you can see the trend over months.