

# Newbie Parent Guide



*Everything You Need to Know to Support Your Child's Chess Journey*



If you're new to the world of chess, you're not alone. Many parents join Mzansi Chess Academy with little or no knowledge of the game. This guide is designed to answer your questions, explain how competitive chess works, and help you confidently support your child as they learn and grow.

## Why Chess Is Beneficial for Children

Chess develops far more than playing ability. Through regular practice, children learn to think critically, solve problems, concentrate for longer periods, and make thoughtful decisions under pressure. They also develop valuable life skills such as patience, resilience, responsibility, sportsmanship, and confidence that extend well beyond the chessboard.

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|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Sharpens Decision-Making</b> – Think fast, choose wisely.                  | <b>Builds Patience &amp; Discipline</b> – Success takes strategy.           |
| <b>Strengthens Resilience</b> – Learn from setbacks, adapt, and grow.         | <b>Enhances Planning &amp; Problem-Solving</b> – Anticipate and strategize. |
| <b>Boosts Memory &amp; Learning</b> – Recognize patterns, retain information. | <b>Improves Social Skills</b> – Foster patience, respect, and connection.   |

# How Chess Ratings and Levels Work

As players gain experience and compete in rated tournaments, they receive a chess rating that reflects their current playing strength. Ratings are designed to match players of similar ability and track improvement over time. Every strong player started as a beginner, so ratings should be viewed as a measure of progress—not success or potential.



Encourage players not to become obsessed with their rating. A rating is simply a **yardstick—a measure of playing strength at a particular point in time**, not a measure of a player's worth, potential, or success. Chasing rating points can become unhealthy and take the focus away from what really matters: learning, improving, and enjoying the game. Encourage children to focus on becoming better chess players, rather than worrying about their rating. **Improve your chess, and the rating will follow.**

## Typical Rating Levels

| Rating    | Typical Level                                                                                       |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Unrated   | New to competitive chess and has not yet played enough rated tournaments.                           |
| 0–800     | Beginner – Learning the rules, basic tactics, and opening principles.                               |
| 800–1200  | Developing Player – Recognises common tactics and is building consistency.                          |
| 1200–1600 | Intermediate – Understands strategy, plans ahead, and makes fewer mistakes.                         |
| 1600–2000 | Advanced Club Player – Strong tactical and positional understanding, regular tournament competitor. |

|           |                                                                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2000–2200 | Expert – High-level competitive player with extensive tournament experience.      |
| 2200+     | Master Level – Exceptional players competing at national and international level. |

Note: These are general guidelines. Ratings can vary slightly between different chess organisations and online platforms.

## Understanding Chess SA Ratings

In South Africa, many official tournaments are rated by Chess South Africa (Chess SA). A Chess SA rating measures a player's performance in recognised events and changes as they compete against other rated players. Ratings are one way to monitor development over time, but they should always be considered alongside learning, effort, and personal growth.

## Choosing the Right Tournaments

Not every tournament is suitable for every player. Beginners benefit most from age-appropriate and development-focused events where they can gain experience in a supportive environment. As players improve, they can gradually progress to provincial and national competitions.



Our coaches are happy to recommend tournaments that best match your child's current level and goals.

# What to Expect at Your First Tournament

Your child's first tournament is an exciting milestone. Before the event, you'll receive information about the venue, schedule, and format. On the day, players check in, are paired against opponents, and play several rounds with breaks in between. Wins and losses are all part of the learning experience, and every tournament provides valuable opportunities to improve.

## What to Pack

To make the day more comfortable, we recommend bringing:

- ✓ A camping chair or picnic blanket (many venues have limited seating)
- ✓ Water bottle
- ✓ Healthy snacks (unless food is available at the venue)
- ✓ A jersey or jacket, as venues can become cold
- ✓ A phone charger or power bank
- ✓ A book, magazine, laptop or another quiet activity while you wait
- ✓ Sunscreen and hats if parts of the event are outdoors
- ✓ Any medication your child may need

## Chess Etiquette for Parents & Players

Chess teaches respect both on and off the board. Players are expected to shake hands before and after games (where appropriate), remain quiet during play, respect their opponents, and accept results with good sportsmanship. Parents play an important role by encouraging effort, celebrating improvement, and allowing children to learn from both victories and defeats without placing unnecessary pressure on results.

# How Much Should Your Child Practise?

Consistency is more important than long practice sessions. For most developing players, a few focused sessions each week are far more effective than occasional marathon sessions. A balanced training routine includes coaching, solving puzzles, analysing games, and playing practice games. Your coach can recommend an appropriate training schedule based on your child's age and goals.

## Online Chess Platforms Explained

Many players practise online between lessons. Popular platforms allow children to play games, solve tactical puzzles, analyse their performance, and participate in online tournaments. These tools are excellent for reinforcing what they learn during coaching sessions and providing additional opportunities for improvement.

## Common Chess Terms Every Parent Should Know

As your child progresses, you'll hear new chess terminology. Here are a few common terms:

- **Opening** – The first phase of the game.
- **Middle Game** – The stage where most tactical and strategic battles occur.
- **Endgame** – The final phase when fewer pieces remain.
- **Check** – The king is under attack.
- **Checkmate** – The game is over because the king cannot escape attack.
- **Stalemate** – A drawn game where the player to move has no legal moves.
- **Blunder** – A significant mistake that changes the game.

- **Tactic** – A short sequence of moves that wins material or creates an advantage.
- **Rating** – A numerical estimate of a player's playing strength.

Don't worry about learning everything at once—our coaches are always happy to explain unfamiliar terms.

## How to Encourage Improvement Without Adding Pressure

The greatest gift you can give your child is your encouragement. Celebrate their effort, commitment, and willingness to learn rather than focusing only on wins and losses. Ask questions like, "*What did you learn today?*" or "*What was your favourite game?*" instead of "*Did you win?*" This approach helps children develop confidence, resilience, and a lifelong love of chess.

## We're Here to Help

Every chess champion started as a beginner—and so did every chess parent.

At Mzansi Chess Academy, we're committed to supporting not only our players but also their families. If you ever have questions about lessons, tournaments, ratings, or your child's development, our coaching team is always happy to help.

## Contact us

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