

## Chess Psychology for Kids

(Translated by Coach Andy from WeChat forward, <http://blog.sina.com.cn/bfqg1995128>)

### 1. Correctly identify oneself as a chess player

I have found it very common among chess kids that they are not aware of or they don't pay attention to their identity as chess players; even some parents are considering chess as an entertainment activity only, not clearly understand what chess is and what should be the role of chess players. This unawareness often causes kids to stop making progress after reaching a certain level, accompanied by some other weakness such as lack of willingness and determination to fight. Therefore, I clearly tell my kids, chess is a sport, a chess player is an athlete; as other strenuous sports, it not only requires excellent technic skills, but also requires strong willingness to fight; it tests a player's physical stamina and perseverance, and demands you to continuously challenge yourself and improve yourself.

### 2. When you play, your goal is to beat your opponent

For a little player who is still learning, you should not have any burden when you play games. If you always think about "I don't want to lose", the opposite will happen. Even playing against an opponent who is weaker than you, you may also fear this or that, and can't do your best; when the opponent is stronger, you have already been defeated without making your first move. In this case, I warn my kids, "I don't want to lose", these words are demons in your mind; you have to change them to "I want to win". "Lose" does not exist in your dictionary before you play your games! But how to make it happen that "I want to win"?

#### 1). get into the winning mode

There is no game that you are guaranteed to win, but there are winning attitude and mind-set! To win a game, you have to play like you will win, with open vision, concrete plan, and firm action; forget about quick gain or lose; be active and flexible, with only one clear goal: to win! To help them understand me better, I show my kids a lot of competition photos of great athletes, such as American basketball star James' dunk shot, flying runner Liu Xiang's rush to the finish line, and Chinese Volleyball Girls' jump and smash. Sports are interchangeable, in regarding to willingness to fight and winning attitude and mind-set!

#### 2). believe you will win but do not rush

Some strong young players often say "I beat you last time", when they know who will be their opponents, showing unwarranted cockiness; the result is often winning with great difficulty or even losing the game; so their ratings can't go up. I tell them: "You two are best friends in life. But when you sit across the board, you are opponents. He lost to you yesterday, doesn't mean he will lose to you again today. The past event doesn't guarantee future result." Some little players start joyfully humming when

they have a smooth game, up some pieces and in a better position. They look around, trying to irritate his opponent and slowly torture him. When you are not concentrating on your game, surprise arises, you either miss the winning opportunity or blunder. Suddenly you fumble and lose the game. You are pissed off and request an immediate re-match to revenge. But after losing your calmness, you may lose game after game. To prevent such impatience, I instruct my kids: "if you are not sure whether you are impatient or not right now, do a few checkmate problems before your tournament, so you see something real and calm down." "You must know 'if you make one wrong move, you might lose the whole game.'" "The tournament room is the battle field. Every piece on the board is your soldier, and your brother, you can't unnecessarily drop any of them because of your impatience!"

### 3). think about strategy and scheme

Strategy is the overall plan for creating advantageous condition, i.e., creating the winning position! This requires knowledge and experience accumulation everyday. Scheme is close to trap, wishing to be undetected by your opponent. For kids, strategy is an abstract concept. I let my kids play more tournaments, solve more tactic problems, then I teach them the middlegame thinking as following:

i). Real attack must gain something, pushing the position to your advantage. This is called "Gain from attacking".

ii). Pure defense is not good. Defending with offence is more powerful. This is called "Defend by attacking".

iii). A brave man doesn't fear of anyone, and will jump into a fight. This is called "No fear for a brave heart."

iv). When facing two good choices, choose the one that will best help you win; when deciding to control damage, choose the one that has least impact; pay special attention to the overall position. This is called "Choose intelligently".

v). Search for attacking opportunities and approaches to develop the position in your favor, with all mastered tactics and strategies. This is called "Hit the iron at the right time".

vi). Have a clear awareness of your position during middlegame; attack when you should attack, and defend when you should defend. Approaches of attacking, and key points of defending should be included in your analysis.

vii). You will win if you calculate more than your opponent; lose if you don't calculate deep enough.

viii). A good player prefers crashing his opponent to gaining pieces; he doesn't fight with his pieces on board, instead he fights with his mind.

ix). Play normal moves, but surprise your opponent often.

x). Although chess is not a flashing endeavor, dignity at the board is invaluable.

xi). Chess behavior is like personal character; both can be dignifying or indecent.

xii). Happy to win and ok to lose. Do not fear of losing, instead fear of no gut to play; do not fear of being beaten down, instead fear of incapability to stand up again.

After having established the general positional ideas, use strategy and scheme in your real games with some tactics, such as:

i). attack the root of a pawn chain.

ii). sometimes isolated pawn is a strong piece and good for you.

iii). do not move those pawns before your king.

4). after planning, do not hesitate

Being passive and hesitant in a winning position is a common problem for chess kids. Some players can't quickly find out that he is better, so they keep the position complex, hoping their opponents could not see their little tricks. They can't make sacrifices, dare not to attack, and defend passively. They worry too much, slowly give up advantage, and lose their games in the end. I tell my kids, if you are better, either simplify or attack forcefully. Your killing moves should be clear and direct to the point. You can't hesitate when you are better.

5). have your own style

I often tell my kids, as how Li Yunlong leads battles in the TV show "Sword out", first you have to be brave; second you have to be calm; third, a mature player should be able to combine fierce fight with calm thinking.

In "Art of War", "good defenders hide under the ground, and good attackers fight in the sky, so they could protect themselves and win the battles completely." This means that good defenders conceal their army so well that no one can see; good attackers parachute their army out of the blue sky so catch their enemy unprepared. In this way they can keep themselves safe and achieve a complete win.

#### 6). Recap of winning psychology

*get into winning mode => use strategy and scheme => with unique style (brave, calm, and balance of attacking and defending) => gain small advantages => convert small advantages to winning position => win!*

### 3. Persevere in a worse position

#### 1). Adjust your thinking, and switch from looking for a win to looking for a draw

Because they are young, when facing a bad position, kids often can't fight back. They just move whatever, only hoping to finish the game quickly. They think they will surely lose, so rarely continue to fight. So I tell my kids, if you are worse, no matter you are down half piece or a whole piece, or being dominated, you can't flash the word "surrender" in your mind. You have reached such a position, either because your opponent is really strong, or because you are not in the mood. You have to focus on your game right away, scrutinize the position and compare your pieces, redo your plan, use some strategies, and look for opportunities in an unfavorable situation. No matter how it goes, do not shake your head or mumble negatively, do not think about winning or losing, fight to the end.

#### 2). Defend with quality, if you see a chance, offense

Defending only is passive. Defending through offense is more effective. Attack while you are defending. Never give up any chance to win something back. Defending is not passively waiting to be slaughtered.

### 4. Face your loss and learn your lessons

A kid under 10 is simple and direct. Overturning chess board or crying loud after losing a game is common. But when you sit before the board, no matter you are old or young, you have to realize that you are a chess player, which means you have to be strong, mind-wise and psychologically.

## **5. Good playing style shows good playing mode**

I often show my kids the competition photos of world class players, such as Kramnik, Anand, Ye Jiangchuan, Judit Polger, Xie Jun, Zhu Chen, Xu Yuhua, Hou Yifan and etc. I explain to them, "I show you their pictures, not only because I want you to know them, but also because I want you to learn their behaviors over the board and their looks. 'Emperors or generals, are they decided by genes?' Only by copying, searching for new ideas, copying again, and searching again, you could grow into a great player better than these predecessors." So for over-the-board behavior, I require my kids to copy these great players: sit straight up when playing, serious, no joking or talking; no matter you have a firm plan or you catch your opponent's blunder, calm down, think for a while and then touch your piece; concentrate during your game, do not look at other kids' games, do not play your fingers, pen or smartphone, do not disturb other players, do not care for anything outside your board. How you act reflects how you think, and how you think decides how you act. After copying for a while, kids become more focused during their games, and make less blunders, then their performance has greatly improved.

## **6. Getting into the zone is critical for playing chess**

The soul of chess is the burning desire for winning, the swift change of plan in a worse position, and the undefeatable attitude. This should be their proper attitude when kids are playing chess. Attitude determines the soul on chess board. Your mind fluctuates with your game; all things starting from your mind, and coming back to your mind. If you lose patience, your game will be rushing; if you worry too much, your game will show your worries. A good player doesn't care about the result of win or lose, instead he cares about the quality of the game, and cares about his feeling during the game.

(End)