

## Coaching Tip for Parents

Through my years of coaching at the national chess championships, I have found a direct correlation among the following: a) time spent per move (longer is better); b) number of blunders or mistakes in a game (fewer is the goal); and c) total score in the tournament (higher is the result!)

Whether or not you personally play chess, you may have observed your child playing their moves rather quickly - perhaps too quickly - and therefore not finding the best move in a position, making 'blunders', and losing more games than one should...WHAT TO DO ABOUT THIS??

In this article, I will give a few reasons why students may be moving too quickly, the importance of taking ones time, and finally some suggestions on how to help your child slow down and not make so many mistakes from just moving too rapidly.

### First, reasons why students may be moving too quickly:

This is a common occurrence when students are first starting out, and it seems to me that this occurs for a number of reasons.

1. The 'urge to move' because it's my turn
2. My opponent moving quickly makes me feel I need to move quickly
3. "If I move quickly my opponent will see how confident I am and probably make a mistake!"
4. There was a chess clock put on my game and I didn't want to lose on time!

These are just a few of the reasons I have observed and heard from students explaining why they moved quickly in a game...though I am sure there are many others!

### Secondly, the importance of taking ones' time:

Unless a person is playing speed chess, taking ones time is essential in order to find good moves. **Chess is NOT a game of 'who can move fastest wins' - it is about who can find the better plan/moves.** Even when one's opponent is running out of time on a chess clock, it is still best to search for the best moves and NOT rush your moves to hopefully 'win on time'. Why? Simply because by playing the best moves, your opponent will actually have a much more difficult time figuring out a good response than if you rush your moves, make a blunder, and your opponent has better chances to find good responses.

Taking ones time to think carefully about a Target, Make a Plan, and then find the Best Moves to execute that plan is essential to playing good games of chess - and also important for gaining the 'life skills' that chess teaches: Planning, Patience, Problem Solving, Critical Thinking Skills, etc.

### Thirdly, some suggestions on helping your child slow down and find GREAT moves:

Here are a couple of training exercises you can do with your child to help find the best moves:

1. Every time your child finds a move they want to play, ask them "why" do you want to do that? After the response, ask "What is your target?" (if not already clear), and finally after that response, "Can you find a BETTER move? When we find a GOOD move, let's see if we can find a BETTER move!" Seek to have your child not just play the first move seen, but always be trying to find a better move.
2. Take a 'chess scoresheet' (which should have 4 columns on it - or simply make up your own scoresheet) - have your child every turn write down their first choice of move in the first column, then BEFORE moving, have them fill in the next two columns with 2 more potentially good choices. Once they have 3 choices filled in, have them make the move they think is best of those 3 choices and CIRCLE their choice on the scoresheet. (Use the 4th column for your child to record the opponent's move.) Doing this exercise will help your child think of possibilities, NOT just play the first move that holds their attention.
3. During tournaments (and practice), do what my Dad taught me - "**Sit on your hands until you are sure the move is a good one!! Don't reach for a piece until you have looked at WHAT your opponent will do in response to the move you are planning!!**"
4. Practice with a chess clock at home, so as to be comfortable with a chess timer and not feel rushed when using a chess clock in a tournament. For longer games, it is a good strategy to try your best to use 1 minute per move - for Nationals level games, averaging 2 minutes per move is best! Even without a chess clock, you could play a game whereby your child gets to think about their move, and every 60 seconds you have a timer go off and then your child plays the top choice.