**Is your child playing chess? Allow the freedom to lose**

**Source: Shilpa Mehra; Child Psychologist, Founder-member of Chess Club Black & White in Lucknow**

Losing is challenging at any age. It hits at your sense of self. You learn, as you grow older, how to process the emotions relating to losing. Chess fosters this learning. However, chess involves one’s mental faculties more deeply than other sports. Therefore, losing a game can be spirit-breaking, leading to most children quitting the game early on as compared to other sports. It’s a little tricky finding the sweetness, beauty and passion for the game in tournaments beyond and outside losing. In chess, you lose; lots at that!

**Can we deal with this?**

**1. Delink chess from intelligence**

All kids who play chess may not be brilliant. All kids who don’t play chess may be competent. Chess, just like music, is an ability that one develops by practice, practice and more practice. Natural talent is a factor but not the only thing. Those people you see in the prize lists are there mainly due to tremendous daily hard work. Chess is just like studying any other subject. Like music, there is no getting around the focused endless ‘*riyaz’*  to make master level or, even club level.

**2. Why chess and how**

Call a family meeting before your kid attends a chess class. Be clear that it must begin at a hobby level. It’s going to be devastating if your kid is doing chess once a week and you land up at the age-group national championship.

Best is to choose tournaments that suit the child’s level and preparation. Start for fun and see how it goes. Evaluate how much time and money you wish to invest in Chess away from studies and other activities. Does your child really want to go through the grind of professional training? If not, go slow, enjoy chess for what it is: a scholastic fun tool to develop analytical skills, meet interesting people, and an art form.

Take chess like you would learn a new language. Allow the child to attend a chess class to jog the mind. Not everyone visiting the gym is planning on a bodybuilding career. One does not have to be a master musician to enjoy and experience a beautiful symphony. For example, it’s great to let chess remain a fun activity away from endless television. Chess also is a fantastic parallel profession. You can be semi-pro for life. It works.

**3. Parent approval**

Those who have travelled to tournaments may have witnessed horror situations watching parents beating up kids on losing. Unfortunately, that happens when much is at stake for a family. Playing tournaments and even basic training is costly.

Understandably, all parents want their kids to succeed, be focused and achieve something. Kids, on the other hand, have the super ability to become lazy, undisciplined monsters. Somewhere in between is a rational line that begins with love. A child losing a chess game, particularly in a tournament, is already upset. Anything you say at that moment will not be heard. The best is to up the affection, hugging and loving quotient at that moment. Keep the analysis for later.

If you want to nurture a champion, let the kid feel a protective cover. Give him the belief that he may lose, the whole world may reject him, but you will love him. A simple hug works. Once the initial sorrow of losing has subsided, you can go back to the disapproval part. The child will be in a better position for positive course correction. Indeed, be strict, but at a time when it will have a productive impact. It’s great to plan a distracting activity right after a game like going to a movie or shopping. The worst stuff to say to a kid after a lost game is what he should have played and why he didn’t.

**4. Just listen**

Most chess players like to tell the entire story of what happened. It’s best to listen with great attention. Allow the child to describe the game and encourage him to tell you everything, even if you don’t play chess yourself.

**5. Have faith in the coach**

If you don’t have faith in your child’s chess coach, don’t send your child to him in the first place. If you do take up coaching your kid yourself, be very sure about what you’re doing. Coaching needs professional methods. It’s always a team. Work closely with your child and the coach but allow your child to find his bonding with the teacher and classmates. It takes at least six months to one year to see progress in playing strength.

**6. Protect against bullying**

It’s okay to push your kid up to a point, not after that. The bottom-line should be your child’s happiness at the end of the day. It’s ok to shift your kid to a junior class to protect against branding by peers. Just discuss with your child’s coach and move them to a junior group if required. The pace of learning varies tremendously in chess. Have a frank conversation with your child and let them know for sure that their joy in playing chess is essential for you than the result.

Finally, take up chess yourself!