

Youth playing at the MetroWest Chess Club

Can kids play at the MCC and are they welcome?

Players of all ages are welcome to play at the MCC. A number of kids, some as young as 8 years old, play there pretty regularly. There are, however, many factors that should be considered in deciding if you want your child to play at the club. This document should provide you with the information you need to make the decision that is best for you and your child.

Are there other young players at the club?

Yes, we typically have several young players participating in each event. Most, but not all, are very seasoned players. In fact, several of them are on the top 50 list in the country for their age bracket.

What are the requirements for playing?

MCC is affiliated with the USCF (United States Chess Federation), and all the tournaments at the club are USCF-rated events. Because of this, everyone who plays in club tournaments needs to be a member of the USCF. Membership for those 19 years old and younger is \$20 per year, which includes a subscription to Chess Life magazine, one of the top chess magazines. For those 14 years old and younger a scholastic membership for is also available for \$13 a year. This membership includes a subscription to School Mates magazine, intended expressly for young kids in place of the Chess Life magazine. (Two- and three-year memberships are available at a slight discount.)

What does “rated” mean?

A rating is a numerical indicator of a player’s strength. The USCF is the official US organization that calculates ratings for players based on the results of the games they play and the ratings of the players they play against.

Do you have to join the club?

Club membership is **not** required but is recommended. Club membership provides a \$5 discount on each club tournament. For those 19 years old and under, membership is \$15 a year, so the membership pays for itself if a member plays as few as three events during the year. In addition, if your child has played no more than five rated games when he or she joins the club, the club will give him or her a \$10 discount on their membership. By playing in just one more event, you have earned back the club membership, and you will still continue to receive the membership discount on entry for the rest of the membership year.

The club meets on a school night. How long will the game take?

Games normally start at 7:30 pm, though we do sometimes get started a little late. On the first round of a new event, starting close to 8:00 pm is not unusual. If both players use all the time allotted to them, the game can last **four** hours.

Will the game really take four hours and end at 11:00 or later?

Typically, the lower the players’ ratings are, the sooner the games are over. Assuming, for the moment, your child does not take full advantage of the time allotted due to age and ability, and assuming the opponent is an adult who would probably take on average half the permitted time, a reasonable guess is that the game would end around 9:30 pm. It could end even sooner if someone loses quickly. In general, even the adults who play in the lower section are frequently finished by 10 pm. Because most adults play much more slowly than the typical scholastic player, however, there is another issue to consider. Your child might get bored with the pace of the game and lose interest in it, or in chess generally.

Does the club have a Scholastic program?

Yes, the club does have a scholastic program, but it is active only in the summer months. Starting in the Spring of 2000, the club’s board of directors recognized that there are many scholastic players in the area and very few opportunities for them to play chess during their summer break. The board initiated discussion with area scholastic coaches and formulated a program that would appeal to young players and their parents while not having an adverse impact on the club’s regular events and resources.

Is there any instruction given at the club to improve play?

The club has a “Study Group” which meets before the tournament game begins. All members of the club are welcome and encouraged to attend. A well-experienced player leads the group in playing through and analyzing a game that has been played at the club. Occasionally, a specific opening or endgame technique is covered. The Study group meets between 6:30 and 7:30 PM on Tuesday nights.

Can I watch my child play?

Yes, you can watch the game. However, you are not allowed to interfere with the game in any way or assist in the playing of the game. We recommend that parents strive to help their children become accustomed to being on their own in the playing room. In almost any other venue, in particular, the many area scholastic tournaments that your child may participate in, parents will not be allowed in the playing room.

By the end of the day, kids are too worn out. Why doesn't the club play during the day?

The club, including its scholastic program, is run by volunteers who, because of their own jobs, have only their evenings and weekends free to give to the club. Moreover our facility, the Kennedy Senior Center in Natick, is actively used for other purposes during the day. For these reasons, all the club's events are held on weekday evenings or on weekend days.

What other things should I take into consideration before deciding whether to enter my child into the event?

There are several questions you should ask yourself:

A. Will my child be discouraged if he/she loses many weeks in a row?

It is common, even for adult beginners, to go many weeks without winning a tournament game. This is true even for players who have played for years casually among friends, because people who play in a club environment improve much more quickly than those who don't and generally have advanced in skill beyond those who've played only casually. Because of the level of competition in our tournaments, your child should expect to lose many games. Careful study of lost games can be one of the best ways to improve, and players routinely "analyze" their games with each other at the club after they are over. You and your child will need to decide whether the improvement from playing tough competition outweighs the discouragement of losing. The main point is to encourage kids to continue playing – no one gets better by not playing. And we at MCC want to avoid any situation where discouragement at losing causes anyone to stop playing chess altogether. Playing in area scholastic tournaments will provide less challenging competition and more opportunities for wins, but probably also slower improvement.

B. Occasionally, I'll be told that my child has been "paired out." Will this discourage or upset him/her?

Being paired out means that because there is an odd number of people playing a particular round in a tournament, someone is left without an opponent for that round. We recognize that being paired out can be discouraging, but it is an unavoidable situation whenever there are an odd number of players. All players are subject to being paired out, but the person actually paired out is usually the lowest-rated player in the lowest score group. No one can be paired out more than once in any single tournament, but anyone who loses frequently in tournaments is at greater risk for being paired out repeatedly. Sometimes we can find an opponent for a player paired out, so he or she can have a game that night after all, but sometimes we can't.

C. On those occasions when the game goes later into the evening, say 10:00 or 10:30 PM, what will be the impact on my child the next day?

Occasionally the game may run late, especially as your child improves. This can create at least two concerns:

He or she may get sleepy and lose the game. This may make him or her very upset. This has happened a number of times, even to adults. Hopefully, you can instill the idea that he or she is obviously improving to have played so long and well up to that point.

He or she is up much later than you'd like, especially when school is in session.

What things should parents try to prepare their children to expect and deal with?

- That it may be many weeks before they win any games.
- That they may win one or two games at first but then not win again for a very long time.
- Generally speaking, low-rated players usually face their toughest opponents in the early rounds of a tournament, and if they lose those games, they will typically face their "easiest" opponents in the last round.
- That they may get paired out from time to time, which could mean a quick return home if an extra match-up can't be found.
- That they can get no advice from anyone else, and that once they sit down to play, they are expected, out of respect for their opponent, to pay attention to their game until it is done.
- That they may become tired and lose the game because they got sleepy. Even adults face this problem every week.
- That you may decide it is too late for them to go over the game with their opponent after it is over.
- That they must write down their moves. The club provides free score sheets for this.
- That "touch move" rules apply. When a piece is touched, it must be moved or captured. No one is allowed to "take back" any move.

Once we decide to play at the club, is there anything else we should know about?

We have a separate flyer, which describes what you need to know about once you've decided to play at the club.

Now that we know about the MCC, how do we find out what other chess activities are available in the area for our children?

The Massachusetts Chess Association, (MACA) is the clearinghouse for all things chess in Massachusetts. In particular, MACA runs youth tournaments throughout the year and conducts the Massachusetts Scholastic Championship series of events that determine the state champions for various categories. A large scholastics information center, with schedules of upcoming events and advice for parents, can be found on the MACA web site at www.MassChess.org