



Teaching your child MiniBridge - 2

Once you've got the basic mechanics of MiniBridge across to your child, there's no reason to rush on to teaching all the features of the game. This early stage is a good time to teach some basic card play techniques, mainly techniques for declarer, though some useful defensive points can also be taught really early on.

The most basic technique is cashing winners. You will be surprised how many mistakes can be made just in cashing "cold" tricks. For example, holding AQJ109 opposite K2, most beginners will cash the ace first, then the king, and only then discover that they are in the wrong hand to cash the remaining winners. Or with AK43 opposite QJ doubleton, they may well decide to play out the ace and king, crashing the queen and jack. You will need to give plenty of practice in getting this right. Perhaps start by seeing how the play works with a single suit of cards on the table, then build the suit holdings into whole hands with traps like these built into them. The general rule that should become apparent is, of course, that you should cash the high cards in the shorter holding first. Get your child to picture a short boy holding a very big card – he could topple over, so he needs to get rid of the big card! The daft picture may help with remembering the rule.



As you develop these plays, your child will start to appreciate the value of holding a long suit. With normal breaks, AQJ43 opposite K2 is just as good as AQJ109. And if you are lucky and find an even split of the remaining cards, even AQ543 opposite K2 will also produce five tricks - the length of the longer holding. And AKQ543 opposite a singleton 2 may produce six tricks. This is fun! Once you've played a few hands, you might like to have a go at this quiz and see how many your child can get right.

QUIZ - HOW MANY TRICKS?

Declarer	Dummy	No. tricks?
1. A 4 3	K 6 2	
2. A K 8	7 5 3	
3. 7 4 3	A K Q	
4. A K	Q 5 3	
5. A	K	
6. A Q 7 3	K J 8 4	
7. Q J	A K	
8. K Q 4	J 6 2	
9. A K 10 5 4	Q J 3	
10. 8 7 6	A 10 9 5 3 2	



The next most common problem to be sorted out with learners is their fear of losing the lead. It is a universal trait amongst beginners of any age – they want to play all their high cards at the first opportunity. So you need to show them a deal something like this:

	♠ Q J 10 9 8	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ 4 3 2	
	♣ Q 9 7	
♠ AK 7		♠ 5 4
♥ 8 4 2		♥ AK 7 3
♦ K Q J 9 5		♦ 8 7 6
♣ A 2		♣ K 8 6 4
	♠ 6 3 2	
	♥ Q J 10 9	
	♦ A 10	

Only for those with an arithmetic bent, you can explain how, as declarer, you can calculate your likely number of tricks in a suit headed by the top honour cards. This is how it is done:

- Add together the number of cards in the suit held by the partnership
- Take this total from 13 to give the number of cards held by the opponents. If this remainder is even, divide it by 2 to give a number x . If the remainder is odd, add 1 then divide by 2 to get x .
- If there is an even break, as is reasonably likely, the remaining cards will split $x : x$ between the two hands, or $x : x-1$ if they have an odd number.
- If you have at least x top honours in the suit, you should be able to win all the available tricks in this suit.

For example: You hold AQ975 opposite K63.

You have 8 cards in this suit, so the remainder when subtracted from 13 is 5. Add one and divide by two to give $x = 3$. So with a good break the suit will break 3 : 2. You have the three top honours in the suit, so should be able to take all the available tricks – in this case 5, as that is the length of the longer holding. Of course suits don't always break evenly, but that is part of the fun of bridge – you don't know for sure what will happen.

Try playing out this hand without giving declarer (W) any advice. This is a good time, though, to introduce a defensive tip about the opening lead. The choice of the top of a sequence of honours is always a good lead – and certainly you must dissuade North from any thoughts of leading a diamond. I guarantee you that, most of the time, West will make just six tricks by cashing all the outside aces and kings before starting on diamonds. If you find a child that doesn't do this, congratulations – you have a natural champion in the making!

Now turn the hand through 90 degrees so that someone else has a go and play the hand again, this time persuading declarer to play on diamonds at trick 2. This time ten tricks should materialise – a four trick difference in the result. Quite striking and hopefully a useful lesson to learn. You will need to reinforce the lesson with other similar hands, but it is such an important point to understand that you should take your time over this.

As you play hands like these, take the opportunity to explain the importance of entries. It is no good having a winning card in your hand if you can't get to be in that hand to cash it. This principle underlies the need to establish winners in suits before you have used up all your winners in other suits, and also the rule we learnt above about cashing the high cards from your short holdings first.

As a final thought for this lesson, you could produce a hand with a holding of AK874 in a dummy with no other winners opposite 653 in hand and set a target of making 4 tricks in the suit. You may need to spell out the problem by playing out the hand first. It's much better if your child can work out the solution, rather than you telling them, so why not leave it as a problem to be figured out before you are ready for the next lesson?

<p>If you would like some hands to help with teaching these MiniBridge topics, you will find sets of suitable hands by visiting the MiniBridge pages accessed via Youth Bridge on the EBU website www.ebu.co.uk.</p>
