

Teaching your child MiniBridge - 3



Having mastered a few basic card play techniques, now is the time to talk about trumps. You can explain to your child that trumps are magic cards! Any card in a trump suit, even the lowly two, beats any card in the other three suits, even an ace. Explain that when you are declarer, you can choose to have a trump suit and which one it will be, or if you like you can choose to play in “no trumps”, with no special suit designated as trumps. Point out that when you have trumps, the important things to know are:

- you can lead a trump at any time;
- any trump will beat any card of any other suit led;
- if another suit is led and you are able to follow suit, you are not allowed to play a trump. But if you are **not** able to follow suit, you can choose to play a trump (or to “ruff”, don’t forget to explain this term), but you don’t have to if you don’t want to;
- if the suit led is trumped more than once, then the highest trump played wins the trick.

So how do you decide on a trump suit? Most learners’ instinct is to choose as trumps a suit in which they hold the high cards, but you need to explain that having more trumps than your opponents is what matters most. It’s great to be able to ruff the opponents’ winners with your trumps, but no fun when they start doing the same to you. Try playing out this hand:

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

Let your child choose which suit to have as trumps – I bet they go for spades. Play out the hand with spades as trumps and see how many tricks are made. Before you play, you can remind West of the defensive tip we learnt last time – that the lead of the top card from a sequence of honours is a good idea. And add another defensive tip for this lesson – that it is usually best to continue playing the same suit each time that you regain the lead. It won’t be obvious at first why this is generally right, but it will become clear as you go on.

In all probability, South will make just eight tricks. Now try playing out the hand with hearts as trumps. This time eleven tricks can be made – a three-trick difference. That’s because this time the little hearts can be used to win tricks by trumping or ruffing the opponents’ winners.

This is an important lesson. You want to have more trumps than the opponents. Time for some mental arithmetic! There are 13 cards in each suit, so if we have 7 trumps they have 6. We only just have the edge and this is not good news. But if we have 8 trumps, they have only 5. That’s much better. And if we have 9 they have only 4 – even better again.

So – when looking for a trump suit, the magic number is eight. With a total of eight cards in declarer’s and dummy’s hands in any one suit, that suit will be OK as trumps. Any more than eight is a bonus!

Drawing trumps

You now need to explain that it is usually right for declarer to ‘draw trumps’ as soon as possible i.e. to play out a few rounds of trumps in order to remove all those held by the defenders. This isn’t something that comes naturally, especially if the defence hold some of the trump honours, so the importance of playing on trumps needs to be stressed. Make sure you prepare plenty of hands where it is right to draw trumps early on, to try to instil the habit of doing this. Hands where it is right to defer drawing trumps can come later.

Remember – you can obtain hands to use for teaching from the EBU website at www.ebu.co.uk/education/minibridge

If the declaring side has at least 8 trumps, the defenders’ trumps can be drawn in 3 rounds most of the time. Declarers should be encouraged to take the time to work out how many trumps the defenders hold, how they are likely to be divided and how many rounds of trumps will be needed to draw them – before starting the play in trump contracts. It’s just the same as the calculation we saw in the last lesson. Do point out, though, that if the last trump held by the opponents is bigger than the last one you hold, you don’t have to draw it. It will win a trick anyway, but you needn’t use up two of your small trumps which might win two tricks separately later.

Starting to score

Now is a good time to introduce the idea of a target number of tricks. The declaring side always has more points than the defenders, so it is only fair that they should have to win more than half the tricks. So give declarer a target of at least seven tricks. The first six tricks don't count and declarer only earns points for tricks after the first six. If fewer than seven tricks are made, the defenders earn points instead. To start with, score by just adding up the tricks won or lost – we'll come on to the more complex scoring features a bit later. But do make a point of keeping a running score. It is a good idea to always note down how many points were held by the declaring side and how many tricks were made. A pattern will soon emerge, especially if you also note down how many trumps are held when a trump contract is chosen. Here's a sample score sheet you could use, or you may wish to devise your own:

Deal No	Points held by		Decl	Contract	Total trumps	Tricks made	Score
	NS	EW					
<i>Eg</i>	24	16	S	<i>Clubs</i>	9	8	+2
1							
2							
3							
4							

The proprieties

If you haven't already done so, now is also a good time to introduce a few of the proprieties of bridge. "Thank you, partner" when dummy is faced is an important thing to learn early on. And of course you will need to discourage such things as beating the chest when partner wants a heart lead, or singing "Diamonds are a girls best friend" when a diamond suit looks best! Explain gently that such methods are not allowed in bridge – but you may whet your child's appetite for more by pointing out that you **can** legally send signals to partner about which suits you like or don't like through your choice of cards. Only explain in detail about signals if you feel your child is ready for this, though.