

Teaching your child MiniBridge - 5



You probably feel that your child is about ready to start to learn bridge after a few lessons of MiniBridge – and no doubt you are right. But it is worth keeping on playing MiniBridge just that little bit longer, because there are some very useful aspects of card play which can be learnt at this stage. And they will be learnt that much more easily before all the rules of bidding come along to add another level of confusing complexity.

There are basic declarer play techniques to be covered in addition to those we have already talked about. The concept of leading towards honours, and the finesse in particular, is a very useful subject to cover at this stage. In MiniBridge, because you know how many points each defender has, it is sometimes possible to be sure that a finesse will work (or will fail). Counting the points and using your knowledge of where points are in deciding how to play a hand is a terrific skill to learn in preparation for the full game of bridge.

The other valuable aspect of play to teach at this stage is defence. Very often, when bridge is being taught at all levels, there is a tendency to gloss over defence. Learners tend to switch off when they are defending, thinking that it is only declarer that has to do all the hard work. But this is of course far from the truth – a good, co-operative defence is one of the most beautiful things in bridge. So now it is well worth while spending some time on defensive techniques. Topics to cover are:

- **Counting the points.** This is perhaps even more important for a defender than for declarer.
- **The opening lead.** We have touched on this topic before, but now is the time to go through the standard leads from different holdings against suit and no trump contracts. All beginners, whatever their age, start by wanting to lead out their aces and kings, and the lead of unsupported aces in particular is something they need to be weaned off. As well as choosing the particular card in a suit, you will also want to talk about how you choose which suit to lead.
- **Third hand play.** Explain that third hand should usually aim to win a trick, but should do so as cheaply as possible, so the bottom of a sequence is the correct card to choose now, rather than the top card when leading. So holding QJ106, for example, the correct card to play is the ten, not the queen. The concept of returning partner's suit is an important one to cover, and also which card to choose when doing so.
- **Signals.** It is definitely worth covering some simple signals whilst still playing MiniBridge. Children have a tendency to signal in unobvious ways such as jumping up and down and saying "Please lead a heart, partner", so they like the idea that you can get this sort of message across legally using the cards. You can cover attitude signals, whereby a high card is encouraging and says you like the suit partner has led, whilst a low card says you are not keen on the suit. In a trump contract, the play of a higher card followed by a lower one may be made from a doubleton, indicating a desire to ruff, rather than just from a holding including a high card. With a very bright child, you may also want to cover simple count signals when declarer is leading a suit, but be prepared for this to cause confusion!
- **Reading the cards.** It is no use signalling just for the sake of it. You need to be able to work out what the signal means. Try an exercise like this one with your child, taking out the cards in a single suit to help work out what is going on.

Card Reading Exercise

1.

| | | |
|-----------|----------------------|---|
| You | 6 3 | |
| J 8 5 4 2 | <input type="text"/> | partner plays the ten declarer plays the queen |

You lead the four.

Who has the ace? Who has the king? Who has the nine?

How many cards did partner start with in this suit?

2.

| | | |
|---------|----------------------|--|
| You | 9 5 3 | |
| K 8 4 2 | <input type="text"/> | partner plays the jack declarer plays the ace |

You lead the two.

Who has the queen? Who has the ten?

3. Against part score in clubs, partner leads the seven of diamonds.

| | | |
|-----------|------------------------|-----------|
| Partner | ♦ 9 4 3 | You |
| leads ♦ 7 | <input type="text"/> | ♦ A K Q 5 |
| | declarer plays the six | |

Which card do you play? Why?

When you continue with the diamonds, which card do you play?

On this card, partner plays the eight. What do you deduce from this?

1. Declarer has the ace and king and nine. Partner therefore started with either 10 singleton or doubleton.

Note that you now know nine of declarer's total number of points.

2. Partner has the queen, declarer has the ten.

3. You play the queen, then continue with the ace, so partner knows you must have AKQ.

When partner plays the eight, it must be from at least three cards. If the 2 had been played it would

Summary

When you have finished teaching MiniBridge well, you will be amazed what your child knows about bridge. Your pupils will have learnt:

- what a balanced hand looks like
- the difference between playing in no trumps or with trumps
- how many tricks are needed for game in no trumps, a major or a minor suit
- how many points are needed for game
- how many trumps are needed for a good trump suit
- how to plan the play as declarer
- how to count points and shape
- how long suits can be used to win tricks with small cards
- how to establish winners by knocking out the opponents' high cards
- how to cut communications by ducking/hold-up plays
- how to take a finesse
- the importance of entries
- the standard opening leads
- which card to play from the third hand, and which to return.

It's an impressive list, and with all this knowledge they will have no trouble at all moving on to bridge. Of course you will need to explain the sequence of the suits and the bids (a bidding box is good for this) but in your first bidding lesson you need only teach that we open 1NT with a balanced 12-14 points. Your pupils should be able to work out **all** the natural responses to 1NT from first principles using what they already know!