

## Overview

Today's world, with its seemingly ever-increasing levels of violence, crime, sex and drugs, presents today's parents with the most intimidating circumstances any generation of parents has had to face. With the media's penchant for sensationalism, through some talk shows and some books, parents may be wary of games, suspecting that roleplaying and fantasy ideas are corrupting the youth of America-their children.

Many of us know and have experienced first hand the results of one sided media reporting which often fails to balance the picture by not reporting about the millions of intelligent and well-adjusted youngsters and adults who comprise the mainstream of the hobby of game play.

As concerned businesses and game players, the members of GAMA believe that parents not only have a right to hear a balanced portrayal of hobby of game play, but that it is our duty as retailers, wholesalers and publishers to share parental concern and work hand-in-hand with parents as their ally in the parenting process. By acting in concert with parents we can do our part in assuring that both our community and our businesses continue to grow together in a positive and wholesome direction.

Game retailers are the key contact points, to tell them that ***Game play is a positive, social activity.***

Many parents enter our stores confused and looking for direction and information. They are confused because the negative words they are hearing from the media or their church pulpit do not match their own observations of their children. They know that their children have generally shown good and moral judgement and character in the past but they are concerned from the stories in the media that fantasy roleplaying has led to criminal acts, satanism and even suicide. They see no immediate danger and they are glad to see a creative side to their intelligent child. But they also wish to exercise good parental judgement and protect their child from potential harm. They may be concerned with the large amount of time their children are spending playing games and wonder whether this is a healthy preoccupation. They may be concerned with the coverage of occult descriptions and symbols and somewhat compelled to suspect that some satanic connections ascribed to fantasy roleplaying are true. But they are willing to give someone who has experience with this subject a listen. So they visit their local neighborhood game store which their son/daughter frequents to see and judge for themselves.

## The Entrance

This is our best chance to communicate. In comes a parent to my store. My ace college commission salesman approaches the parent but soon discovers that there is really no buyer's appetite, that they're just a "looker", so he leaves the parent alone, waiting for a "real buyer". Here is where I can make all the difference. A parent doesn't walk into my store with a sign around their neck telling me that they are here to judge whether their child's new hobby is one they can accept. I safely assume, however, that most first-time interested (but uninformed) lookers are probably at least giving the games and books a close look to see if they can find out "if the stories are true". Parent or not this person needs communication from me to undo some possible misrepresentations to which they may have been introduced. This is where my store's appearance, personnel, and attitudes are so critical. These make my customers' entire initial impression. Does my store and staff strike them as a place and people they would want their kids to be around? Is this a healthy environment for their children?

### *How does your store measure up?*

## The Approach

If this person is a parent they will probably choose to tell me their parental concerns if they sense I could be sensitive to their problem. My conversational approach and slightly formal appearance (I wear a tie when out on the floor) tend to set them at ease. I try to make them feel comfortable enough to introduce any subject. But knowing the reluctance of most parents to share such personal thoughts, I usually bring up the subject by asking them how they feel about our products. I like to personally make the approach rather than my ace salesman because my age (mid 40s) implies maturity and perhaps a sympathetic thought that I, too, may be a parent and may have the same concerns. At any rate, I'm not going to take a chance of not knowing why they're in my store. I'm going to find out by striking up a conversation. If I can be of help I will, and I will risk rejection. If they absolutely refuse my overtures, I believe I'm sensitive enough to know it quite quickly and not appear overly aggressive.

Nonetheless, I believe in the importance of assessing our Customers' needs and filling them. I rank parental concern and need for information as one of my store's paramount priorities.

## The Objection

Serious objections to the adventure games we sell generally fall into one of two categories: religious and psychological.

Religious arguments generally are the more difficult to answer since religion is truly personal belief and discussion is not apt to change those deep seated emotional beliefs no matter what facts are presented. Of course, that is not the goal. The goal is to educate, so that the parent can make the most informed decision. That's what they probably want, why their in my store. I believe that discussion can cause a person to reevaluate why he or she believes what they do and explore whether they can personally tolerate exposure within their family to, say, a fantasy character who is evil in nature. If it is obvious to me that a person's religious beliefs do not permit such exposure I would attempt to deflect their choices to other games that would be acceptable, say, from fantasy to science fiction or sports. I believe it's important, however, not to offend them by ignoring their sensitivities. My experience suggests that even the more fundamental religious groups can abide with the majority of games we carry but I will respect their right to decide and try to insure my opinions don't offend them. I choose, therefore, at some point to deflect our discussion to games we can agree on. I still do feel it's important to discuss, to give people with deep seated religious belief the opportunity to explore their own feelings and come to their own independent conclusions. Usually some will agree to accept our games without feeling guilty.

Psychological arguments usually are easier to counter simply on the basis of appealing to a persons' common sense and asking them to refer to their own experiences. For example, I often point out that a car is not evil simply because it assists a bank robber any more than it is inherently good when it serves as a lifesaving ambulance. It is, I insist, the driver behind the wheel that makes the car act. Likewise, I remind the customer, so it is with a game, or, frankly, most any other activity. Certainly it has the potential for evil and could be so used, however, it is the user that is accountable. When dealing with a parent I do admit that a child who cannot pretend has no business roleplaying, or using guns, or driving a car, or a million other activities. To state otherwise would be dishonest and it is especially important not to speak in half-truths.

When a parent shows confidence in their children's judgement, based upon that same parent's teaching the child their value structure, adventure games can have a very beneficial and positive effect. Our games teach group

togetherness and cooperation to achieve common goals. They teach optimization- minimal effort for maximal results. They teach problem solving and statistical relationships. They teach leadership and the value of making decisions and acting upon them. They reward the organized planner and point a positive correlation between planning and winning. They appeal to the intelligent and inquisitive mind (how many of your customers are "A" students or potential "A" students?). Certain consequential relationships also become readily apparent with roleplaying games. The roleplaying thief must face the wrath of his peers when he is caught. I have remarked to more than one parent that this "game laboratory" is certainly preferable to learning this same lesson on a real trip to a police station.

A long-standing store has the benefit of "growing up" with its younger customers, and can point with pride to its first crop of game-playing youngsters who are now successful military officers, scientists, geologists, police officers, computer specialists. This is certainly reassuring evidence to all of us. I frequently quote a Newsweek letter to the editor from an intelligent young man who, using the current almanac and the TSR-released figures for numbers of the Dungeons and Dragons games sold, showed that the teenage suicide rate of fantasy roleplayers was significantly lower than the national average (in fact, their is documented evidence of this from psychological studies, and GAMA intends to produce a brochure on this in the near future). He further mused that maybe because 95% of all penal residents ate mashed potatoes that we should be aware of people who ate them in our midst.

Parents who hear these ideas and the experience of those of us in the industry who have seen two and a half decades worth of adventure game playing youngsters are comforted by these honest and common-sense thoughts. If nothing else, we as concerned businesspeople and citizens owe them that much- the honest truth.

*This pamphlet was written originally by Wayne Godfrey, former owner of Wargames West in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has been edited by the staff of GAMA. We thank Wayne for his insights.*

***Roleplaying Perspectives For Parents*** is produced in conjunction with the Industry Watch Committee of GAMA. This pamphlet is available in quantity, upon request.



Each year in late June or early July thousands of game enthusiasts gather to play at GAMA's showcase convention Origins®, the International Game Expo and Fair. Amongst nearly 2,000 scheduled events are demonstrations of new games and introductions to a huge variety of games. GAMA's Games in Education Committee gives seminar(s) on using games in classrooms and other educational settings. In the future, depending on teacher interest, the seminars roster may include more and more seminars & workshops on this key element of getting kids involved and enthusiastic about learning. Contact GAMA's Executive Director for more information.



The objective of the Game Manufacturers Association is to promote the general interest of all persons engaged in the buying, selling, licensing, or manufacturing of gaming products. Naturally, if we can help educate the public about the positive, social benefits of game play we all win!

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# Roleplaying Perspectives For Parents

## A Guide For Retailers

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