



Warning! Death or Serious Injury Can Occur
A Game Poem about Parenting Advice
by Kat Jones

Number of Player: 4-6 (and possibly more!)
Supplies Needed: Pens and paper or note cards.

This game focuses on the contradictory and dire warnings that current and prospective parents receive from various sources: friends, family, books, and blogs. Using parody to defuse the power these warnings hold over both parents and non-parents, game play should evoke laughter, but should also open a space to examine this advice with a critical eye. *You do not need to be a parent to play this game.*

Preparing to Play:

First create some satirical, nonsense parenting warnings/advice.

Talk with the other players about parenting advice they've encountered in various locations. Focus particularly on advice that tends to be the topic of debate: soothing vs. crying it out, co-sleeping vs. cribs, breast feeding vs. bottle feeding, natural birth vs. painkillers, watching television/screen time. Frame the advice in terms of warnings about the dire consequences resulting from ignoring the advice. Some examples:

- Warning! More infants die in adult beds than anywhere else.
- Warning! Breast milk is the best and only food a baby needs. Formula can cause diarrhea, allergies, or other problems.
- Warning! Babies who cry too much could suffer permanent brain damage.

While these examples all deal with infants, the advice generated by players can be for children of any age (even teenagers).

Using the examples generated as a template create some mad libs advice cards. Remove nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc so that you have several mad libs statements that need to be completed. Some examples:

- Warning! More infants (dire consequence verb) in (noun) than anywhere else.
- Warning! (Noun) is the best and only (noun) a baby needs for the first 6 months. If a mother gives a baby (noun) it can cause (dire consequence) or other problems.
- Warning! Babies who (verb) too much could suffer permanent (dire consequence).

Each player should create at least one mad lib advice card that needs to be completed.

Now trade your mad lib with another player. Fill out the mad lib in front of you, be as silly as you want when filling in the missing words. Make sure it is advice that can be challenged by a contradictory opinion. Now read through the advice that has been created, give people a chance to laugh or exclaim at the ridiculousness of the advice.

Playing Scenes:

Make a pile of the advice you've created. Now it is time to set scenes where parents will have to deal with receiving and processing this advice. One player should act as the Scene Guide for each scene. They should read the advice out loud and then assign roles. This should be done in collaboration with the other players, but the Scene Guide should step in if the discussion drags on for too long.

In each scene at least one player should be playing a Parent, but feel free to add additional parents to the scene. For the purposes of this game the “Parent” characters should always be co-parenting, but they do not have to be a romantic couple. In addition to the Parent(s) one player should play a supporter of the piece of advice, and another player should play a supporter of the contradictory opinion.

Set the scene: This might be a group of friends hanging out together or co-workers talking over lunch, but it can also be less literal. Two players might represent different respondents on an online forum, or two different parenting books, or two websites the Parent has Googled for information on the topic.

Try not to spend too much time setting the scene. An enormous amount of detail isn't necessary to establish before the scene starts, but the Scene Guide should make sure everyone is on the same page about who everyone is playing and where the scene is taking place before the scene begins.

Be mindful of the type of Parent characters that you are creating and try to set scenes with Parents from different types of families:

- adoptive parent
- co-parents who are not romantically coupled
- parents who aren't hetero couples
- expecting or prospective parents
- foster parents
- parents of children rather than infants
- step parents

Now play through the scene. The scene is taking place “in real life” let it happen as a conversation between all the characters involved. If the scene is more metaphorical, play this scene as a “bird-in-the ear” with the advice giving characters chiming in during the the Parents' discussion as a voice in one of the Parent's heads. For example, the advice in play is “If you let your child ride alligators to school, they might spontaneously combust.” Co-parents are trying to decide if their child should ride an alligator to school, so they consult two different parenting books. One is totally in support of alligator riding, while the other warns of the dire consequence of spontaneous combustion. While the Parents discuss, the two players playing the parenting books throw in their opinions or speak directly to one Parent or the other. *Play these scenes as seriously as possible, even if the advice itself is ridiculous.*

The scene ends when the players or Scene Guide call “Cut.” This should be done when the scene becomes too silly or when one of the Parent characters feels overwhelmed by the conflicting advice. *Continue playing scenes until all advice cards have been used.*

Debrief

Take some time to discuss your experiences playing the game. Here are some sample questions you might want to ask the group:

How are you feeling right now?

What did you find surprising about the game?

What did you find challenging about the game?

What role did humor play in your experience of the game?