

DAY CARE(A) 51

A comedic freeform LARP about child care and cryptids

Written for [Golden Cobra Challenge 2023](#) by [Moss Bosch](#) and [Ben Ojanen](#)

NECESSARY MATERIALS

- 2-5 players
- 1-2 hours
- A group audio/video chat and shared virtual note taking space, OR physical space to sit together in a large circle, pens/pencils, index cards, and copies of the Daycare Charter/Incident Reports
- 6-sided and 20-sided dice OR a random number generator

PREMISE

You are daycare workers at a facility that caters to the needs of cryptids. Your charges display all of the usual tendencies towards chaos, creativity, and curiosity usually evidenced by children, but they also might warp through walls, weep blood, pronounce grim portents of doom, or always be so dang blurry in photos that it's impossible to get a good shot of them for the weekly class newsletter.

One part of your job is recording and reviewing incident reports. Accidents, injuries, and behavioral upsets can happen at daycares of all types, even when everyone is doing their best in a well-maintained facility. Keeping good records can help you pick up on any patterns or themes in incidents, and figure out how to better address them in future - for example, does the ominous glowing portal at the edge of the playground need stronger fencing? Are there sensory or space-sharing issues between nocturnal and diurnal students at naptime? How can you best resolve fairness disputes in tetherball when the players have wildly different numbers of limbs?

tone AND SAFETY

This is a silly, satirical game that draws on common themes in paranormal and horror fiction and explores them through the lens of child care work safety standards.

In the real world, child care is often an underpaid, undervalued profession. It can involve safety risks to staff and/or children as the result of many factors, including but not limited to: understaffing, insufficient resources or training, or harmful philosophies of care. This game is not designed to dig deep into these real world challenges and traumas, but may hit on them in the course of gameplay regardless.

Approach this material with consideration for your fellow players, and establish boundaries and safety tools that suit your gameplay group. At a minimum:

- Determine a way to stop/pause gameplay and check in with each other out of character.
- Remember that your physical and emotional safety as players is always more important than the game. Sometimes, the best move is to take a break, or to stop playing entirely.

SOURCES

This game draws inspiration from [Warning! Death or Serious Injury Can Occur](#), a 2016 Golden Cobra LARP by Kat Jones, particularly in regards to the creation of Mad Lib-style safety information and the exploration of child care experiences via humorous, surreal reframing. It also owes creative debts to the collaborative horror fiction of the [SCP Foundation](#), the cryptid art of [Eduardo Valdés-Hevia](#), the inventive random tables of [Dungeon Crawl Classics](#), the absurd high-security school setting of You Chiba's manga [Kindergarten Wars](#), and the co-writers' own experiences working in child care.

GAMEPLAY

Gather together in your shared physical or virtual space. Select one player to be the Site Manager. They will help lead group discussion and redirect conversation as needed if it strays from the topic at hand - Incident Report review, and the betterment of your daycare program. All other players are Teachers. Have the Site Manager take suggestions from Teachers to fill in the blanks in the Daycare Charter. Collectively pick a name for your daycare from the suggested names list, or create your own together.

Create some Students for your daycare using the Child Feature Table. Each player should create 1-2 Students by rolling on or picking from the Child Feature Table 2-4 times per Student, and recording their results on an index card or in a shared virtual note space. Give each Student a name, and optionally add a small doodle of them to their index card, or find an image/symbol online that represents them (literally or abstractly).

Example Students

Name: **Ichabod** 🦴🩸🔪

Weeps blood, skin is translucent, expresses excitement by screaming, brought their knife to daycare

Name: **eeeeEEEEeee** 👁️💭🚗

Causes hallucinations in others, responds to stress with lasers, usually wears Heelys

Name: **André** 🏠😞😬

Responds to stress by biting, has difficulty making friends, sees parallel realities, brought their strangely heavy backpack to daycare

Shuffle and redistribute the Student cards so that each Teacher is assigned a Student they did not originally create. If playing virtually, have the Site Manager randomly assign Students to Teachers. Each Teacher now fills out an Incident Report related to their assigned Student (they may incorporate additional Students into the report if desired, including the one they originally created). Not every Student needs to appear in a report.

When all Incident Reports are filled out, the Site Manager opens the staff meeting by reading out the Daycare Charter, then inviting Teachers to share their Incident Reports for review. Go over the reports together one at a time, sharing ideas on what could have been handled differently, noting any repeated themes in incidents (at the daycare in general or regarding a particular Student), and how well the staff response to each incident reflects (or doesn't reflect) the values in the Daycare Charter.

If conversation topics wander, or the discussion becomes contentious, the Site Manager should redirect the discussion back to the Incident Reports. When all of the Incident Reports have been reviewed, the Site Manager can invite each Teacher to share a highlight from their work week, a challenge from their work week, and something they hope to change/improve about the daycare in future.

DEBRIEF

Out of character, you may optionally do a short group debrief by sharing favorite moments from the game, speculating on future challenges the daycare center might encounter, and expressing gratitude to each other for creating a collaborative freeform story together.

If the game's themes resonate with you and you have the means to do so, you can also research organizations that support equitable child care access or child care workers' rights in your community, and make plans to donate your time or money.

CHILD FEATURE TABLE

1	Weeps (1: blood 2: ammonia 3: liquid fire 4: mercury 5: acid 6: champagne)
2	Difficult to perceive (1: invisible 2: inaudible 3: intangible 4: causes hallucinations in others 5: technically visible but impossible to photograph 6: projects illusory copies of themself)
3	Must be immersed in (1: fresh water 2: salt water 3: heavy water 4: lava 5: sand 6: acid)
4	Skin is (1: slippery 2: changes color based on emotions 3: changes color to camouflage 4: translucent 5: squirms 6: glows)
5	Can only eat (1: emotions 2: live animals 3: dreams 4: effluvium 5: money 6: nuclear waste)
6	Parents/guardians (1: dote on the child 2: bring food for staff 3: are very religious 4: have concerns about _____ 5: want to be your friend 6: attempt to eat the child)
7	Is as big as (1: a breadbox 2: a mid-size sedan 3: a thimble 4: a stone monolith 5: a completely average human child 6: whichever Teacher is closest to them at the time)
8	Can see (1: regrets 2: electromagnetism 3: the dead 4: luck 5: nearby traffic 6: parallel realities)
9	Responds to stress by (1: screaming 2: biting 3: writing threatening letters 4: prophesying doom 5: lasers 6: ceasing to communicate with everyone except one Teacher)
10	Expresses excitement by (1: screaming 2: biting 3: taking flight 4: changing the weather in an extremely localized radius 5: smiling with all of their mouths 6: emitting radiation)
11	Wants to know about (1: comic books 2: dinosaurs 3: medieval daemonology 4: sports 5: baby animals 6: the exact circumstances of every Teacher's birth)
12	Brought their _____ to daycare (1: pet skeletal mouse 2: heavy duty chew toy 3: much-loved teddy bear 4: strangely heavy backpack 5: stack of age-inappropriate reading material 6: knife)
13	Has difficulty with (1: making friends 2: remaining corporeal 3: following multi-step instructions 4: shedding their skin 5: teething 6: sportsmanship)
14	Favorite part of the day is (1: nap time 2: outside time 3: snack time 4: group games 5: ominous chanting circle 6: the witching hour)
15	Energy level is usually (1: high 2: low 3: wildly fluctuating 4: serene 5: overwhelming 6: zero)
16	Often wears (1: a puffy coat 2: a lead shield 3: a sundress 4: plate armor 5: Heelys 6: nothing)
17	Smells (1: floral 2: acrid 3: rotten 4: smoky 5: strangely sweet 6: like ozone)
18	Gets picked up from daycare (1: late 2: early 3: via tractor beam 4: under sedation 5: unmoored from the regular flow of time 6: in a rush, by a parent/guardian wrangling many siblings)
19	Responds well to _____ as a motivator (1: individual attention 2: stickers 3: fresh meat 4: dance breaks 5: complex code breaking exercises 6: emergency flares)
20	When they grow up they want to (1: rule Hell 2: be a ballerina 3: have a podcast 4: consume an entire tri-state area 5: ascend to another plane of existence 6: take lots of naps)

DAYCARE CHARTER

We hold ourselves to high standards around staff and student safety, while also cultivating a spirit of [strong emotion] _____. We are guided by principles of [virtue] _____, [vice] _____, and lifelong learning in our provision of quality child care.

We are committed to maintaining a state-of-the-art facility that can serve up to [improbable number] _____ students, and meet their needs for creative growth, social development, physical activity, [esoteric hobby] _____, [edible substance] _____, and [inedible substance] _____.

DAYCARE NAME IDEAS

- Mr. Ruppelt's Child Care
- Blue Book Daycare
- Cryptidkind!
- Friends of Fresno Community Association
- Condon Child Care Center
- The [REDACTED] Facility for [REDACTED]

INCIDENT REPORT

Name or alias of child:
Location of incident (<i>indoor, outdoor, extradimensional, etc.</i>):
Any materials involved in the incident (<i>playground equipment, sports equipment, ritual items, drugs, weapons, etc.</i>):
Brief description of incident and any resulting injuries (<i>be clear and concise, do not embellish with personal feelings or hallucinatory revelations</i>):
Treatment provided by staff (<i>first aid, emotional support, sorcery, etc.</i>):
Who was notified (<i>parents/guardians, religious officials, extra-governmental bodies, etc.</i>):