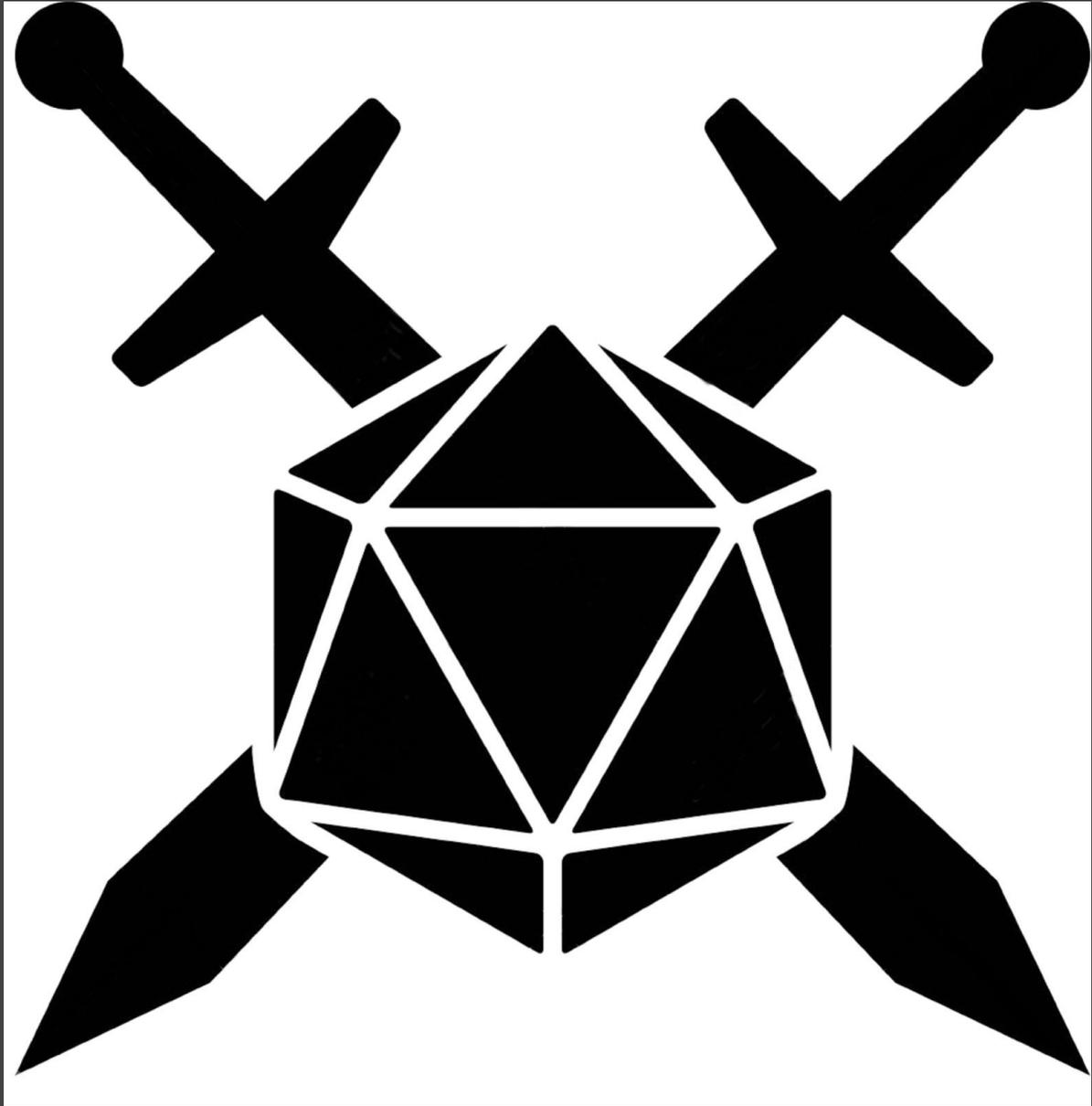


*Slick Dungeon's 10 Golden Rules of Dungeon
Mastering for Kids*



Introduction

My name is Slick Dungeon and I love playing Dungeons & Dragons. Specifically, I love playing this game with kids. I have played Dungeons & Dragons with my son and his friends for the last three years at least once a week every week. It's an incredible bonding experience full of fun, imagination and memorable stories.

Starting a campaign with kids might sound intimidating but it doesn't have to be. You might not have played this game and have no idea where to start. You might be a seasoned player but you only play with adults and don't see how this could ever work for kids. You might think the idea is great but feel like it's too much to handle because there's a lot of math involved, the rule books are big and expensive, and it can be overwhelming to look at all the other equipment that can go with the game.

No matter where you are in your thought process, I want to convince you that you should do this and that it's easier than you think. Here are my ten Golden Rules of Dungeon Mastering for kids. These rules can be applied to any Role Playing Game (RPG) but I will be talking about Dungeons & Dragons because it is the most popular and effective RPG ever made.

Rule #1: Role Playing Games Are a Perfect Fit for Kids

I am not the first person, nor will I be the last, to think RPGs are perfect for children. Kids develop a variety of skills from playing these games, they have fun doing it, and they learn, sometimes without even realizing that they are learning.

Imagination

Dungeons & Dragons really lets the imagination loose. Kids love telling stories. As adults, often we are too busy to truly sit and listen to their stories but while playing this game, we are in a shared narrative with them. Not only are they telling a story, you are helping them to tell it. You get the bonus of giving it a little structure so it's more satisfying to both of you.

Socialization

Kids learn to socialize through role playing. In the current age of TikTok, Twitter, video games at the fingertips of virtually every child, and television, it is great to have a game that essentially forces the players to interact socially. And this game is good for introverted and extroverted kids. They get to be anyone they want to be so it's less intimidating for those who are shy; if they're not shy they get to make their personality be as big as they want it to be.

Problem Solving

Because the game is set up to let your imagination free, unlike playing a video game where there are only so many actions you can take, there is always more than one way to solve a problem. There might be ten different ways to approach a nasty looking Ogre, from trying to attack it to offering it the hand of friendship in order to get the magic item the kids are looking for. That's not to mention all the ways in between those extremes. Dungeons & Dragons constantly puts problems in front of kids and says to them, "What do you want to do?" The kids can experiment to see what works. They'll quickly learn that one way of solving a problem doesn't work for all problems.

Reading

This game encourages reading. Even if your kids are reluctant readers or are early in their reading careers, playing Dungeons & Dragons will make them want to learn more -- about the world their characters inhabit, about where their characters come from and about the game itself. You know what a great way for them to learn more is? You guessed it -- reading. There is a vast wealth of reading materials related to Dungeons & Dragons. Everything from ABC books to choose your own adventure-style books to the hefty core books and modules. Kids don't even have to be readers yet to play RPG's; they just need someone to help guide the story and understand what their characters are capable of. But once they get going, if they enjoy playing, they will definitely want to learn more. That's your opportunity to encourage them to read about it. If they are early readers, read with them and you will both get even more out of this game.

Math

While some people are intimidated by the amount of math involved in this game, it's not as bad as it seems. For the most part, it's just addition and subtraction. Anyone who can count to 20 and do simple math should be able to do any of the math involved. Kids will learn to do more addition and subtraction in this game than you might realize and they usually don't mind doing it because it is part of a fun game they get to play. It's not nearly as complicated as the money system in Monopoly. I realize that there are large rule books and that there are a bunch of numbers in them so you might not believe me, but if you read and get used to the rules, it will become second nature not only to you but also to your kids.

Don't just take my opinion for it

I hope I have now convinced you that you should play Dungeons & Dragons with your kids. But if not, I will let some more eloquent authors tell

you the same. Check out this article from [CBC Parents](#), or this one from [The Bark Blog for the Connected Family](#), or this one from [Book Riot](#). I could give you more examples but I am pretty sure you get the point by now.

Rule #2: Learn the Rules

Alright, you've been convinced but you have no idea where to start. This rule is easy. Start with the rules. You will want to learn and understand the rules to the best of your ability. You do not need to know every rule in the book, that's a nearly impossible task, but you do need a general idea of what they are. My recommendation is to read the rules once, not worrying at all about if you understand everything, then read a second time to give yourself a deeper understanding, then read a third time, looking up any rules you are not sure of online or in chat groups to clarify their meanings.

While you want a good understanding of the rules, many will not apply perfectly to your table or to your kids. There will be rules you are going to want to bend or break and that is perfectly okay. You want to be flexible with the rules when you play with kids. Stay consistent with what you change but it is totally fine to adjust rules as needed. You need to know the rules to be able to be flexible with them. You can download the simple rules for the low, low price of absolutely free right [here](#).



Rule #3: Bend and Break the Rules

Reading through the rules can be overwhelming. There are a bunch of terms in there that you may not have heard of or that seem like they mean one thing but actually mean something else. There is one rule that I want

you to remember above all others: If the rule doesn't suit your game, change it or ignore it. I am going to quote something out of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, which is the longer book of rules for DMs. "The D&D rules help you and the other players have a good time but the rules aren't in charge. You're the DM, and *you* are in charge of the game." Did you catch that? The designers of the game are giving you permission to adjust or change anything in the game that you want to. If you hate the idea of alignment, throw it out. If you can't stand figuring out ability modifiers, you can get rid of them. You might have to adjust other things as well but you can get rid of anything that doesn't work for you or add in things to make the game better. I can't presume to know what you want or don't want to happen at your table with your kids but you already have the permission for it to happen. This game is cooperative, not competitive, so as long as everyone has fun, everyone wins. How you do that is up to you. Just realize that you can be flexible here when it comes to the rules.

Rule #4: Prepare Yourself and Your Kids

Alright, so you have decided to play, you learned the rules and you are excited to get going. The next step? Get your kids excited. How? There are lots of ways. If you already play the game and your kid knows that, they probably want to play with you. If you have never played the game but your kids have begged you to play, they are already enthused. If your kids have no idea what Dungeons & Dragons is and you want to play with them, you might actually be in the best position here.

There are a bunch of books made for kids that can get them excited for playing. On top of the general books, fairy tales and stories about monsters and dragons, knights and princesses, there is actually a series of books called the Young Adventurer's Guide series. Some of the titles are *Warriors & Weapons* and *Wizards & Spells*. These books are excellent at telling the

story without getting bogged down in the mechanics of the game. And even if your kids can't read, they have gorgeous artwork that makes it easy for kids to understand who they can be in the game.

If you are still hesitant about the math and the rules, don't let yourself get bogged down in that while you generate enthusiasm for your kids. Talk the game up and let them know that it's a big story that you tell together where they get to be the heroes. That's usually enough to sell most kids on it. But if they are not interested or not ready, don't worry, there will still be time to get them into it. This is the type of game you play for life.



Rule #5: Never Make Anyone Play This Game

You've done your best to get your kids into Dungeons & Dragons. You talk about it all the time and you have shown them story books, the cool dice

they would get to roll and the neat miniatures you have spent hours of your life painting. They understand that mom loves Dungeons & Dragons and she really, really wants them to play. Nothing seems to work, so the best thing to do is to sit the kids down at the table and make them play it, right? Wrong. That's the last thing you want to do. Don't force a kid to play this or they will hate the game. This also applies even in the middle of a session. If a kid suddenly tells you that they just don't want to play, they are not interested, or they are just bored of this, let them walk away. It'll be that much better when they decide to come back to the table. I know of kids who used to say that the game was boring and that they would never play, only to see them years later enthusiastically playing with friends. That's great. Don't take it personally if kids don't share your interest, give it time and it's likely they will come back to it later.

Rule 6: Never Exclude Anyone From This Game

On the flip side of never forcing anyone to play, never exclude someone who wants to play. While you might tell your kids that they can't play the adults only Dungeons & Dragons game you are in, you might want to set aside time to play some sessions with your kids. If you have multiple children, depending on the age, they might all want to play. Don't assume that just because your daughter is super into the game that your son doesn't want to play. Ask them if they wish to participate. If they do, make your best effort to get them into the game. You might be surprised how capable siblings are at working out issues with their imaginary characters. Don't think this will necessarily translate to real life, but at least in an imaginary world they might work together. As far as most of us who play this game are concerned, the more people who want to play the better. Now, you still have to be reasonable. If your family has eight children and they all want their friends to come over and play the game too, at the same

time, that's probably going to be too many people. But as long as it is within reason, let people who want to play be a part of the game.



Rule #7: Shorter is Better

While the game can be extremely fun for kids of any age, it's easy to overdo this. If you are playing with kids aged 4-6, you don't want to exceed 15 minutes. Any longer and you are going to lose them. For this age group having a short encounter with one or two creatures is usually enough. You can always continue the story at a later session. For kids ages 6-8 you can get away with 30 minutes or so. You can have two to four encounters, depending on the situation and the type of encounter and that is usually enough for this age group. For kids 8-10 you can go up to an hour. This age group can deal with four to six encounters, again depending on the creature and the type of encounter. For ages 10-12 don't exceed 90

minutes and do include a break around the 45 minute mark. If it seems like too much for your kids, you can always stop after the first 45 minutes and pick it up again later. These time limits are just guidelines. Some kids will be great with playing longer and some will need even shorter sessions. Take your cues from your kids. If they seem fidgety or bored, it's probably time to make something cool happen and then call it a day. How you do that will be up to you but introducing a new creature or character is always a great way to provide mystery and excitement for the next session.

Rule #8: Let the Players Be Awesome

When you finally get to the table and you're ready to play, you will already have a clear idea of exactly what you expect will happen. Toss that idea out the window because what kids do can't be predicted. You think that the goblins are going to get into combat with the characters and it will be a fun battle? Yes, it might be. Or, you might find that your kids are more interested in seeing if the goblins want to buy a leftover hunk of bread they have in their pockets.

Here's what you do when your plans are suddenly disrupted in a completely unexpected direction; go with it. Let it happen. If your son has the idea that his wizard is going to sneak to the back of the room and hide under a table until the enemy approaches and then pretend to be a ghost so that the villain is afraid to attack, let that happen. Have them make some dice rolls so it doesn't seem like it's completely a free for all but definitely allow cool or unexpected (and sometimes ridiculous) stuff to happen.

While we're on the subject of letting the characters do awesome things, there is one thing that you should never do when playing with kids.

Don't kill their characters. Kids grow very attached to their own creations and killing their characters can be traumatic for them. If they get to the point in the game where they are at zero hit points or are making death saving throws and fail, describe their character as getting knocked out or falling asleep instead. Then they can wake up elsewhere to fight another day later. Never tell the kids that you won't kill their characters but make sure that you don't kill them.

Let them have that dog they've been begging for... as a member of their party. I can almost guarantee that your kids are going to want to make something in the game a pet. My kid and his friends have had a variety of pets -- from dogs and cats to owlbears and otyughs. The best thing to do in this situation is to make the pets an honorary member of the party. I even let the pets take a turn on the same turn as the player who looks after them. This can create some really fun and interesting role play. As with the player characters themselves, do not kill their pets. They can also be knocked out if things get dicey, but if you think it might be bad to kill a kid's character, you have no idea how much worse it would be to kill one of their pets.

Finally, I want to give a word about alignment here. In the game there is a game mechanic called alignment. It's basically a scale that allows characters to be anywhere between super good to super evil. My recommendation for younger players (and really any new player in general) is to trend toward the good alignments. If your kids play evil characters, it's hard for them to be the heroes of the story. You don't have to actually use alignment at all and for seasoned players this doesn't even come up that often. But for kids, it's readily understandable that they are good and want to be out in the world doing good. Even kids who make mistakes tend to still think they are doing things for the right reasons. Let their characters be bigger than life heroes coming right out of their own imaginations. It will work better narratively in almost all situations and your kids will love it.



Rule #9: Conclude Each Session but Leave Them Wanting More

Even if you don't currently play Dungeons & Dragons, I am sure you have watched great television shows. Dungeons & Dragons campaigns are a

little bit like those shows you love. Each game session is like an episode of a show, while a campaign is like a season of a show. Once you have completed the entire campaign you can decide if it gets renewed for another season or you try a different series.

One thing almost all great television shows have in common is that they try to end the episodes with viewers wanting more -- whether it's comedy, drama, action or any other genre. A great way to get kids to want more in this game is to end the session at the right moment. You want them to be left wondering, "What is going to happen next?" If you are able to do that, they will come back for more. It's also really engaging if you are able to start the next session with some interesting action or a new revelation that the players were not expecting. It is sometimes a better idea to end a session early at the right dramatic moment than to let it drag on an extra five minutes into an anticlimactic ending. Choose your moment carefully and get out at the right moment. You can always continue the story later. And your kids will be even more excited for it to happen.

Rule #10: Have Fun!

The first time you play this, you are going to make mistakes. The thousandth time you play Dungeons & Dragons, you are going to make mistakes. There is nothing at all wrong with that. Your goal is to have fun and hopefully get your kids to have fun too. Fun is more important than anything else in the game. You don't have to know all the rules to have fun. You don't have to be able to do different accents or funny voices to have fun. You don't have to do math to have fun. Each time you play you will learn a little bit more about the game and learn new ways to make it fun. No matter what else you do while playing this game, try to make it as fun as you can. That might mean going with a crazy plan the characters came up

with. That might mean dressing up in amazing costumes even if you are just playing at home. You get to decide how to make it fun but whatever your method is, do it to the best of your ability. Then do it again and again and again and again. You won't regret it.



Bonus Rule #11: It's Okay to Mini or Not Mini

You will hear some Dungeon Masters who work with kids say that kids can't conceptualize combat without miniatures. For those who don't know what a miniature is, it is a small figure that represents a character or monster in the game. While it can be a wonderfully useful tool and help to define the rules of combat, especially when it comes to knowing how far creatures are from each other, these are not required for playing the game. Kids can still understand combat perfectly well without miniatures. You may need to go out of your way to be a little bit more descriptive about where the characters are during combat, but you can do this without the minis.

If you do want to use minis, I do have a few warnings about them. First, they are highly collectible so you can end up sinking money into them. If you don't mind that, have at it. Even if you have some minis, you can reuse them over and over again to prevent the collection from getting out of hand. These minis can take up space too and some of them are difficult to get your hands on. Don't get me wrong, I like using minis, I just don't believe they are required for kids to have fun here.

If you really want to use minis or some other figure to represent combat, I have two suggestions for you. First, there are paper minis. These are just paper figures you can print or cut out and put into a pretty cheap plastic base. I would recommend starting with these if you want D&D themed minis but are not willing to invest too much money. Secondly, most of us who are parents have at least a few lego minifigures lying around. These make excellent substitutes for minis. Often you can find ones that might look like the characters your kids play. I wouldn't go out of your way to get new ones just for the game but make use of what you do have lying around already. If you discover that you and your kids love playing this way, then

you can always expand your collection. Just don't think you must have a collection to begin playing.

Conclusion

If you enjoyed this content, please let me know by sending me an email or a tweet or visiting my blog and leaving a comment. If you want to see anything specific addressed when it comes to kids and gaming or have suggestions for improvement, please do the same.

If you would like to get more tips like what you read here, please sign up for my mailing list on my blog.

You can expect tips about gaming with kids from me in your inbox biweekly. If you decide you don't want those tips, simply unsubscribe.

I hope that you've gotten something out of these golden rules.

Until then, happy gaming.

Sincerely yours,

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