

# How POKEMON and Magic Cards Affect the Minds and Values of Children

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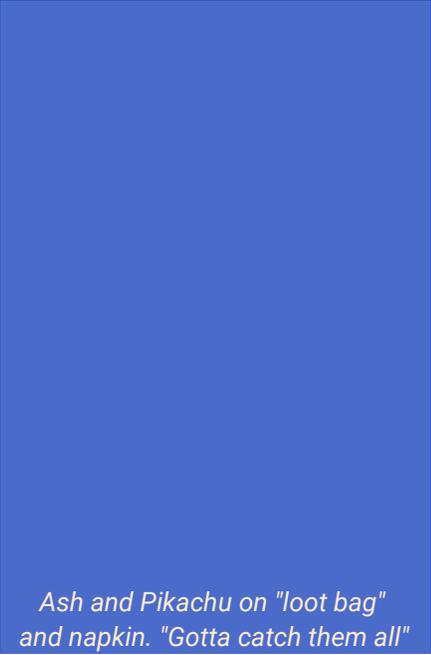
Note: This article was written to encourage Christian parents who share our goal of following Jesus and trusting His Word. It is not an attempt to change the world or censor Pokemon. So if you don't share our faith, I suggest you not read this article. If you do read it, please also read our first [response](#) to all the Pokemon mail.

For [text only](#) (no pictures). For pictures of the Pokemon world, click [here](#): <http://www.pokemon.com/> For information about Wizards of the Coast and Pokemon role-playing games, click [here](#). You may also want to read the [comments](#) from Pokemon fans.

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**W**ho are the strange little creatures from Japan that have suddenly become global super-stars? Most kids know the answer well: They are called Pokemon (short for POCkEt MONster and pronounced Poh-keh-mon), and they have stirred up some mixed reactions.

"We just sent a letter home today saying Pokemon cards are no longer allowed on campus," said Paula Williams, a second-grade teacher in Danville, California. "The kids know they're supposed to be put away when they come in from recess, but they're often in the middle of a trade, so they don't come in on time. In the more extreme cases, the older kids are getting little kids to trade away valuable cards . . . . It drives a teacher crazy."<sup>1</sup>



Ash and Pikachu on "loot bag"  
and napkin. "Gotta catch them all"

It concerns parents even more. "Recently, my children were given a set of Pokemon cards," said DiAnna Brannan, a Seattle mom. "They are very popular with the children at our church and elsewhere. I was instantly suspicious but couldn't discern the problem. We have since been told that they are stepping stones to the 'Magic cards' that have been popular for the last few years, which we do not allow."

She is right. For instance, children exploring some of the most popular Pokemon websites [2](#) will find links to a selection of occult games. At the site for the Wizards of the Coast (makers of the Pokemon and Magic cards), a click on an ad for "Magic the Gathering" brings Pokemon fans to promotions such as this:

"A global games phenomenon, Magic: The Gathering is to the 1990s what Dungeons and Dragons was to the 1980s, but with the added dimension of collectibility. Here is the official reference to the biggest new teen/young adult fantasy game of the decade, complete with full-color reproductions of every existing Magic card."

**THE POKEMON MESSAGE.** The above websites gives us glimpse of the mysterious little creatures called Pokemon. Ponder the suggestions in this greeting:

"Welcome to the world of Pokemon, a special place where people just like you train to become the number-one Pokemon Master in the World!"

"But what is a Pokemon, you ask. 'Pokemon are incredible creatures that share the world with humans,' says Professor Oak, the leading authority on these monster. 'There are currently 150 documented species of Pokemon. . . . Each Pokemon has its own special fighting abilities. . . . Some grow, or evolve, into even more powerful creatures. . . . *Carry your pokemon with you, and you're ready for anything! You've got the power in your hands, so use it!*'" [3](#)

What if children try to follow this advice? What if they carry their favorite monsters like magical charms or fetishes in their pockets, trusting them to bring power in times of need?

Many do. It makes sense to those who watch the television show. In a recent episode, Ash, the boy hero, had just captured his fifth little Pokemon. But that wasn't good enough, said his mentor. He must catch lots more if he wants to be a Pokemon master. And the more he catches and trains, the more power he will have for future battles.

So Ash sets out again in search for more of the reclusive, power-filled, little Pokemon. His first step is to find the "psychic Pokemon" called Kadabra and snatch it from its telepathic, pink-eyed trainer, Sabrina.

Or so it would seem to a first-time viewer not familiar with the contradictory themes. Actually, Ash doesn't try to "catch" Kadabra. In spite of the prodding to increase his inventory of Pokemon warriors and of the constant reminders to "catch them all," Ash was merely trying to win a standard battle. With the ghost Haunter on his side, it should have been a cinch!

But Ash underestimates the power of his opponent. When he and Sabrina meet for the fight, both hurl their chosen Pokemon into the air, but only Kadabra evolves into a super-monster with a magic flash. Haunter hides. "Looks like your ghost Pokemon got spooked," taunts Sabrina.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, Ash didn't understand the supernatural powers he had confronted. Neither do most young Pokeman fans today. Unless they know God and His warnings, they cannot understand the forces that have captivated children around the world. And if parents underestimate the psychological strategies behind its seductive mass marketing ploys, they are likely to dismiss the Pokemon craze as harmless fun and innocent fantasy. In reality, the problem is far more complex.

**MARKETING A NEW LIFESTYLE.** The Pokemon mania supports a financial conglomerate that knows how to feed the frenzy. The television series is free, but it drives the multi-billion dollar business. It also inspires the obsessive new games that disrupt schools and families by giving the children --

- a seductive vision: to become Pokemon masters
- a tempting promise: supernatural power
- a new objective: keep collecting Pokemon
- an urgent command: "gotta catch them all"

These enticements are drilled into young minds through clever ads, snappy slogans, the "Pokeman rap" at the end of each TV episode, and the theme song at the start of the show:

"I will travel across the land  
Searching far and wide  
Each Pokeman to understand  
The power that's inside.  
*Gotta catch them all!"*

The last line, the Pokemon mantra, fuels the craving for more occult cards, games, toys, gadgets, and comic books. There's no end to the supply, for where the Pokemon world ends, there beckons an ever-growing empire of new, more thrilling, occult, and violent products. Each can transport the child into a fantasy world that eventually seems far more normal and exciting than the real world. Here, evil looks good and good is dismissed as boring. Family, relationships, and responsibilities diminish in the wake of the social and media pressures to master the powers unleashed by the massive global entertainment industry.

No wonder children caught up in the Pokemon craze beg for more games and gadgets. The Japanese makers count on it. Since the *means* often justify the economic *ends* in the entertainment industry, the Pokemon website is full of tips, explanations, and ads that encourage the urge to splurge - and to express the darker side of human nature. Ponder their influence:

"You can catch a Mew by cheating with a Gameshark."

Ahhh. The Gameshark. . . Cheating is not honorable. But many of you have requested and sent me this information, so I have put it up for all you cheaters."

"The Moon Stone evolves certain Pokemon, such as Clefairy."

"Select your desired attack. Hold down the button until your opponent's life stops draining."

"Once you have captured Zapados, you can use it to quickly lower the health level of Articuno. . . ."

While children delight in these mysterious realms, concerned parents worry and wonder. What kinds of beliefs and values does

the Pokemon world and its links teach? Why the emphasis on evolution, supernatural power, and poisoning your opponent? **CHANGING BELIEFS and VALUES.** Barbara Whitehorse started seeking answers after her son asked a typical question: "Mom, can I get Pokemon cards? A lot of my friends from church have them." Much as she wanted Matthew to have fun with his friends, she gave a loving refusal. Matthew's tutor had already warned her that the Pokemon craze could stir interest in other kinds of occult role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons. At the time, she wondered if the tutor had just over-reacted to some harmless entertainment. After all, the cute little Pokemon creatures looked nothing like the dark demonic creatures of D&D. But when she learned that a local Christian school had banned them because of their link to the occult, she changed her mind.

Later, during a recent party for Matthew, Barbara heard two of the boys discussing their little pocket monsters. One said, "I'll just use my psychic powers." Already, the world of fantasy had colored his real world. So when some of the kids wanted to watch the afternoon Pokemon cartoon on television, Barb again had to say "no." It's not easy to be parents these days.

Cecile DiNozzi would agree. Back in 1995, her son's elementary school had found a new, exciting way to teach math. The Pound Ridge Elementary school was using Magic: the Gathering, the role-playing game called which, like Dungeons and Dragons, has built a cult following among people of all ages across the country.

Mrs. DiNozzi refused to let her son participate in the "Magic club." But a classmate gave him one of the magic cards, which he showed his mother. It was called "Soul exchange" and pictured spirits rising from graves. Like all the other cards in this ghastly game, it offered a morbid instruction: "Sacrifice a white creature."

"What does 'summon' mean?" he asked his mother after school one day.

"Summon? Why do you ask?"

He told her that during recess on the playground the children would "summon" the forces on the cards they collect by raising sticks into the air and saying, "Spirits enter me! They call it 'being possessed.'"

[5](#)

Strange as it may sound to American ears, demonic possession is no longer confined to distant lands. Today, government schools from coast to coast are teaching students the skills once reserved for the tribal witchdoctor or shaman in distant lands. Children

everywhere are learning the pagan formulas for invoking "angelic"[6](#) or demonic spirits through multicultural education, popular books, movies, and television. It's not surprising that deadly explosions of untamed violence suddenly erupt from "normal" teens across our land.

Occult role-playing games teach the same dangerous lessons. They also add a sense of personal power and authority through personal identification with godlike superheroes. Though the demonic realm hasn't changed, today's technology, media, and multicultural climate makes it easier to access, and harder than ever to resist its appeal.

**ROLE-PLAY AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ADDICTION.** The televised Pokemon show brings suggestions and images that set the stage for the next steps of entanglement. It beckons the young spectator to enter the manipulative realm of role-play, where fantasy simulates reality, and the buyer becomes a slave to their programmer.

Remember, in the realm of popular role-playing games - whether it's Pokemon, Magic the Gathering, or other selections -- the child *becomes* the master. As in contemporary [witchcraft](#), he or she wields the power. Their arm, mind, or power-symbol (the pokemon or other action figure) become the channel for the spiritual forces. Children from Christian homes may have learned to say, "Thy will be done," but in the role-playing world, this prayer is twisted into "My will be done!" God, parents, and pastors no longer fit into the picture fantasized by the child.

Psychologists have warned that role-playing can cause the participant to actually *experience*, emotionally, the role being played. Again, "the child becomes the master." Or so it seems to the player.

Actually, the programmer who writes the rules is the master. And when the game includes occultism and violence, the child-hero is trained to use "his" or "her" spiritual power to kill, poison, evolve, and destroy -- over and over. Not only does this repetitive practice blur the line between reality and fantasy, it also sears the conscience and causes the player to devalue life. The child learns to accept unthinkable behavior as "normal" .

To be a winner within this system, the committed player must know and follow the rules of the game. Obedience becomes a reflex, strengthened by instant rewards or positive reinforcement. The

rules and rewards force the child to develop new habits and patterned responses to certain stimuli. Day after day, this powerful psychological process manipulates the child's thoughts, feelings, and actions, until his or her personality changes and, as many parents confirm, interest in ordinary family life begins to wither away.

You may have recognized those preceding terms as those often used by behavioral psychologists. They point to a sophisticated system of operant conditioning or behavior modification. The child must exercise his own intelligent mind to learn the complex rules. But after learning the rules, the programmed stimuli produce conditioned responses in the player. These responses become increasingly automatic, a reflex action. Naturally, this can lead to psychological addiction, a craving for ever greater (and more expensive) thrills and darker forces.

### **WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?**

It's hard to teach restraint to children who are begging for gratification. Wanting to please rather than overreact, we flinch at the thought of being called censors once again. Parental authority simply doesn't fit the fast-spreading new views of social equality taught through the media and schools. Yet, we must obey God. He has told us to train our children to choose His way (Proverbs 22:6), and we can't turn back now.

If you share my concerns, you may want to follow these suggestions. They will help you equip your child with the awareness needed to resist occult entertainment:

1. First, look at God's view of contemporary toys, games and cartoons. As a family, read Scriptures such as Ephesians 5:8-16, 6:10-18 (the armor of God); Philippians 4:8-9; and Colossians 2:9. Compare them with the values encouraged by Pokemon and other role-playing games.
2. Share your observations. Spark awareness in a young child with comments such as, "That monster looks mean!" or "That creature reminds me of a dragon," along with "Did you know that in the Bible, serpents and dragons usually represent Satan and evil?"

3. To teach young children a Biblical attitude toward evil before they learn to delight in gross, ugly characters, make comments such as, "Who would want to play with that evil monster? I don't even like to look at him. Let's find something that makes us feel happy inside."

4. Model wise decision-making. Tell your child why you wouldn't want to buy certain things for yourself.

When your child wants a questionable game or toy, ask questions that are prayerfully adapted to your child's age, such as:

1. What does this game teach you (about power, about magic, about God, about yourself)? Discuss both obvious and subtle messages.

2. Does it have anything to do with supernatural power? If so, what is the source of that power? Does it oppose or agree with God's Word?

3. What does it teach about violence or immorality and their consequences?

4. Does the game or toy have symbols or characteristics that link it to New Age or occult powers?

5. Does it build godly character?

In a nation consumed with self-indulgence, self-fulfillment, and self-empowerment, godly self-denial seems strangely out of place. But God commanded it, and Jesus demonstrated it. Dare we refuse to acknowledge it? According to the age of your child, discuss Jesus' words in Matthew 16:24-26, then allow the Holy Spirit to direct your application.

Far more than earthly parents, God wants His children to be content and full of joy. But He knows better than to give us all the things we want. Instead, He gave us His word as a standard for what brings genuine peace and happiness. The apostle Paul summarized it well:

"Whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is*

anything praiseworthy - let your mind dwell on these things." (Philippians 4:7-8)

After hearing God's warning and praying for His wisdom, nine-year-old Alan Brannan decided to throw away all his Pokemon cards. "My friend did the same," said his mother. "Her twelve year old son had been having nightmares. But after a discussion with his parents about the game and its symbols, he was convicted to burn his cards and return his Gameboy game. That night slept well for the first time in a month."

"It seemed to us that these cards had some sort of power," continued DiAnna Brannan. "Another nine-year-boy had stolen money from his mother's purse (\$7.00) to buy more cards. When questioned, he confessed and said he had heard the devil urging him to do it. The family quickly gathered in prayer, then saw God's answer. Both the boy and his little sister burned their cards, warned their friends, and discovered the joy and freedom that only comes from following their Shepherd."

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*You may want to read a report on [Magic: The Gathering](#) by Steven Kossor, licensed professional psychologist and certified school psychologist. His information is for adults, not children.*