

PATCHWORK

A Game About Siblinghood

You need 3 to 5 players (maybe you can do this with more than 5, but I make no guarantees). Each player needs to be open to playing with honesty, vulnerability, and trust, with the knowledge that this game will be played in public even though it touches on difficult personal issues. If players have any concerns about specific triggering issues, have them look through the cards and ensure they'll be okay.

To prepare, print these instructions and the cards. Cut the cards out and sort them by type (light, heavy, concluding). Bring pens and sticky tags (or strips of paper to slip into your badge holder if playing at a con) for names and other data. Assemble other players, get them warmed up, and start playing!

Special Thanks

Much love and gratitude to the wonderful folks at the ComedySportz Portland improv theater, whose workshops inspired a lot of the material herein. You all are amazing and I'm blessed to be a part of such a supportive community.

Warm Ups

Before you start playing, you will warm up. Stand in a circle and do the following exercises.

1. Introduction

Go around the circle and have everyone state their name, how many siblings they have, and one word that describes their family.

2. Affirmation

One person starts by looking into another player's eyes and saying either their name, their number of siblings, or their family description. (You're expected to guess and get it wrong in the beginning. Have the addressee correct it in a friendly way and keep on.) The addressee answers with "Yes!". The first person now walks forward to take the addressee's spot. That second player finds the eyes of another player, says their data, receives a "Yes!" in return, and walks over there. Do this until everyone has changed places a few times.

3. Vulnerability

Take turns sharing a short true story of an interaction with one of your family members that changed you and/or your relationship with them.

4. Reaction

One player steps forward into the circle. Another player joins them and faces them. The first player makes a statement, such as "I just won the lottery" or "Your shirt doesn't match your pants." The second player takes a few seconds and then provides an emotionally charged response. That emotion should be obvious and slightly exaggerated and can be something like joy, sadness, fear, or anger. For example, they could answer the statement about the lottery joyfully ("Yay! Now you can buy me that Porsche I've wanted!"), sadly ("Now that you're rich you're going to leave me, aren't you?"), fearfully ("Oh no! All of our crazy relatives are going to come out of the woodwork!"), or angrily ("Another thing falling into your lap! You've never had to work for anything in your damn life. It's not fair!"). Then the two players step back and other players continue the exercise with a new statement and reaction. Do this until everyone had a few chances to provide reactions.

Setting Up The Characters

The characters are all adult siblings of the Klein family. Each player determines for themselves:

- a name for their own character.
- a starting age between 18 and 28.
- a current or targeted profession for themselves that is one of their real close family members' (for example, your mother's job or your brother's college degree).
- a personal interest that is one of their other close family members' (for example, landscape paintings your father does in his free time or your mother's collection of model trains).

Ideally, you have sticky "My name is" tags to put your name and (starting) age on, but since you're playing this at a con, at least you'll be able to write on a strip of paper and put it in your badge holder.

Also put a symbol on your name tag, very visibly, to indicate your comfort level with physical interaction: either a minus, a circle, or a plus. They mean the following:

- You are not comfortable with *any* physical contact during or after the scenes.
- O You are okay with shaking hands, being touched on your shoulder, and light hugs
- + You are fine with tight hugs, having your face touched, and other intimate touches

Respect this symbol! Someone with a - is not open to be touched at all, not even hugged at the end of a scene. For others, at least at the closing of a heavy scene, I suggest a hug if you feel drained.

As this is a game about siblings, romantic or sexual contact is *completely* off the table. Physical violence is also right out; these are not the kind of siblings who attack each other.

Once everyone has filled out their tag with name, age, and symbol, go around the circle and have everyone introduce their characters. Include the character's preferred pronoun in each introduction.

Now you're ready to play!

Playing the Game

During the game, you will play out scenes in the lives of these characters. The scenes are provided on cards that have the following entries:

- the top row shows:
 - o type of scene (L for light, H for heavy, C for concluding)
 - o title of scene
 - o number of characters in the scene
- the text entries below are:
 - o a situation these characters are in
 - o physical starting positions for the characters
 - o character attitudes (often based on the physical positions or relative ages)
 - o an introspective prompt (pondered during quiet time before starting the scene)
 - o a question that needs to be resolved

You start with one player drawing a random light scene card, handing it to a reader, and positioning themselves in the play area. The reader announces the number of characters and waits until enough other players enter the play space to add up to that number (some cards have a + to show that the number is a minimum, but the scene can contain more). The reader (who should avoid being in the scene unless the number requires it) then announces the situation and the starting positions. After the players have taken the starting positions, the reader tells each one their attitude in this scene. Then the reader announces the introspective prompt for the players in the scene. Remain quiet for one minute to let the players really ponder that prompt and get into character. Finally, tell them the question they need to answer. (If they need it, remind them about their attitudes.)

One of the players in the scene starts talking. Any of them can also mime an activity they're engaged in that fits their environment, if they have the focus for it. Now each player acts as their character, based on the attitude given, and tries to bring out the interaction between the siblings. End the scene when the question has been answered.

One player who hasn't been in the previous scene draws a card and gives it to one of the players from the previous scene. Make sure that people get about equal spotlight, but also that the same people don't end up playing together all the time.

Play light scenes until you feel ready for a heavy one. Then you can pick from either pile as you wish.

Carry forward your character and their experiences from scene to scene. Reference what has come before (even in other players' scenes, to the extent that you'd know about things they went through). It's possible that a lot of time passes between each scene, maybe even years.

Once everyone has played in at least one heavy scene and you're ready to finish up, play a concluding scene. After that, close out the game with applause (that might seem incongruous, but that's the point: to provide a clear break from the experience and lighten up). Then debrief about the game: go around and share something that will stick with you from the game. Leave any more specific feedback to one-on-one conversations or online interactions later.

[L] Concert 2

You are at a concert of an experimental band. You came together in one car and have no other way to get home.

One of you is dancing around, the other is standing there looking a bit lost.

Dancing: you're the one who dragged your sibling to this place and you're loving it; other: you just got a text that your partner had a really bad day and would love to have you come home.

Introspective: Remember events that others dragged you to.

Question: Do you stay the whole full two hours until the concert is over?

[L] First Car 2 or 3

One of you is buying their first car and has asked for some company when preparing to make the purchase. You're in the car dealership lot looking at cars.

All of you are standing.

The youngest among you is about to buy their car and has a notion what they want; whatever it is, the others will object and advocate for a different kind of car.

Introspective: Think about the cars you and your family have had and the places they took you.

Question: What kind of car do you end up buying?

[L] Lock Up 2+

One of you was arrested for a minor infraction (public drunkenness, brawling, civil disobedience, etc.) but won't face charges. You are in the police station hallway waiting for release processing.

One of you is sitting, the others are standing.

Sitting: you're the arrested, figure out what you did and why; standing: you came to help out your sibling and were majorly inconvenienced coming here.

Introspective: Think about your family's relationship with police and the law.

Question: Will this change your behavior in the future?

[L] Jump 2

One of you really wanted to go bungee jumping and dragged the other one along. You're both in harnesses waiting for your turn. You're talking about other things to pass the waiting time.

One of you is standing, the other sitting.

Standing: you are very excited about this; sitting: you are trying to figure out how to get out of this, because you're really scared, but you don't want to show it.

Introspective: Think about the scariest thing you've ever done.

Question: Who is going to jump first?

[L] Graduation 2+

One of you just graduated from a school (either befitting their age or they went back to college later in life). You're in the school's hall after the ceremony.

One of you is holding something, the others are standing around.

Holding: you have just graduated; others: you are here to congratulate.

Introspective: Think about how life changed for you after graduation.

Question: Who in your family was the most supportive in your pursuit of this degree?

[L] Job Interview 2

One of you is buying an outfit for a very important job interview; you're at the high-end clothing store.

One of you is lifting something, the other regarding it from a few steps away.

Younger sibling: you're the one gearing up for the interview and you're really nervous; older sibling: you're just full of advice on outfits and interview tactics.

Introspective: Ponder your first interview, or how you imagine it would go.

Question: What do you end up wearing?

[L] Wedding Jitters 2

One of you is about to get married but is having second thoughts, the other is the best man or maid of honor; you are in the hallway right outside the aisle as guests and caterers are walking about.

One character is sitting with head in hands; one character is standing.

Sitting: you are wondering whether you should really get married; Standing: you are not fond of the chosen spouse-to-be but want your sibling to be happy.

Introspective: Ponder spending 50 years with the same person, even if you're not perfect together

Question: Is the wedding on or canceled?

[L] Military Service 2

One of you is considering signing up for military service (full time, reserves, or national guard). You're outside the recruitment center.

One of you is pacing, the other standing still.

Pacing: you're about to sign the enlistment contract; standing: you came along to make sure your sibling really knows what they're getting into.

Introspective: Think about the military lifestyle and its tradeoffs.

Question: Do you enlist?

[H] Addiction 3

One of you has become addicted to a substance (alcohol, pain killers, etc.), which is threatening to ruin your life. You are gathered outside a counselor's office.

One of you is sitting, the other two are standing.

Sitting: You're the addict, just lost something very important to your addiction (your job, partner, etc.), but resent being here anyway; standing: choose to be understanding or critical.

Introspective: Think about the role addiction has played in your family.

Question: What's the real problem you were escaping from with the drug?

[H] Adultery 2

One of you is having an affair with your long-time partner's best friend; you plan to ask for advice while meeting your sibling under the guise of going shopping.

One of you is standing, the other approaching.

Standing: you're the one having the affair and don't know what to do; approaching: unbeknownst to your sibling, you've been cheated on before.

Introspective: Ponder your current or longest-time partner cheating on you.

Question: How will you try to resolve this predicament?

[H] Bone Marrow 3

A cousin of yours needs a bone marrow transplant and you are identified as capable donors; you are in a restaurant near the hospital after getting briefed by the doctors.

All of you are sitting at the table.

Each character's beginning attitude is strong hesitation: make up a major opportunity or event in your life that you would miss out on due to the time and energy spent on donation and recovery.

Introspective: Ponder your relationship with cousins or friends and what the limits of your sacrifice for them would be.

Question: Who, if anyone, is going to make the sacrifice and be the donor?

[H] Coma 2

One of your parents is in a coma and doctors say they will never wake up; you are in the hospital hallway outside of their room.

One character is pacing, one character is sitting with arms around their legs.

Pacing: you lean toward turning off life support; Sitting: you lean against turning off life support.

Introspective: Think about a loved one you've lost or fear losing.

Question: will you turn off life support?

[H] Amputation 2

One of you is going to lose a limb due to injury or illness. You're sitting in the holding room of the hospital before the operation.

Play rock-paper-scissors; the loser is the one who will lose a limb. Pick which one and start the scene staring at it.

The other one is here for support.

Introspective: Think about all the things you take for granted that a loss of a limb would take away.

Question: You have just received a note from your doctor that you can keep your limb, but there's a 33% chance of it leading to your death. Which do you choose?

[H] Unwanted Pregnancy 3

One of you just got the news of an unwanted pregnancy (themselves, a partner, or an illicit lover). You're meeting at a restaurant to decide what to do about it.

All of you are sitting.

Youngest sibling: you're the one dealing with the unwanted pregnancy and are mostly scared; middle sibling: you think an abortion would be the best solution; oldest sibling: you're anti-abortion.

Introspective: Ponder times in your life when having a child would have required major sacrifices and life changes.

Question: Will you have the baby?

[C] Family Reunion All

You came to Las Vegas for a family reunion; you are standing outside the banquet hall, in which some of the rest of your family is currently loudly fighting.

Everyone chooses for themselves whether they're standing freely or leaning against something or someone.

Standing: you think it was a good idea to come see family even if it's not perfect; Leaning: you wish you hadn't come.

Introspective: think about fights among other family members that didn't include you.

Question: either you *all* are going back in or you *all* are going out for drinks until the reunion's over. Which is it?

[C] Baby Shower All

One of the characters is expecting a baby (themselves or their partner); the siblings have gathered to give them a baby shower, but first they all had to go to the mall together to pick up a few things.

One player is sitting down, the others are standing.

Sitting: you're the future parent; Standing: you're lending support and reminiscing.

Introspective: ponder the impact a child's birth has had on your family.

Question: What's going to be the baby's name?

[L] **Moving In** 3+

One of you is moving into their first house, the others are helping; you're currently at the U-Haul place waiting for service.

One character is holding a stack of flat boxes, the others are standing around.

Box carrier: you're moving in and are all excited; Standing: pick whether you're super excited, envious, afraid of them being farther away, or resentful that you have to help with the move

Introspective: remember details about the homes in which you grew up

Question: Will the new homeowner throw a home warming party, and if so, who all is invited?

[L] **Scratch It** 2

You're in the middle of the grocery store, and one of you just finished scratching a lottery ticket and won \$10,000.

One of you has their hands thrown in the air.

Hands in the air: you won! Time to celebrate! Other: you didn't win! You are either jealous and want a share or worried that it'll go to waste.

Introspective: Imagine suddenly having \$10,000 at your disposal. What would you do with it?

Question: Will the money be shared with others, like your siblings, and what will be bought with it?

[L] **A Year Abroad** 3+

One of you has decided on very short notice to spend a year in a different country (choose a very remote one). You are all at the airport.

One of you is standing alone, the others together.

Alone: you're the one about to go through security and be away from your family and your partner if you have one; others: you've come to say good bye, but each of you has mixed feelings about this.

Introspective: Think about what it would be like to have a loved one suddenly very far away for a long time.

Question: Why are you really leaving?

[L] **New Pet** 3

One of you is about to buy their first dog or cat (your choice); you're at the pet store trying to pick one.

One of you is leaning forward looking at an animal, the others are standing nearby.

Leaning: you're the prospective pet owner; of the others, the older : you want your sibling to go all out and get the biggest most expensive pet or two or three; the younger: you don't think your sibling will make a good pet owner.

Introspective: Think back to fond moments with your pets or other animals.

Question: Which pet do you pick?

[L] **The Game** 2+

You have spent 6 hours playing a board game together (maybe Monopoly) at a café, and as midnight approaches neither player is anywhere near winning.

Two of you are sitting. If anyone else is in the scene, they are standing.

Sitting: you're still facing off after 6 hours of play time; standing: you lost the game hours ago and are either annoyed, amused, or filming this on your cell phone to put on YouTube.

Introspective: Think about times when you were really competitive with family members or friends.

Question: Who will break the stalemate and forfeit the game?

[L] **Family Trouble** 2

One of you has had a big fight with one of your parents and stopped speaking with them for the last several weeks. You're at a restaurant.

One of you is sitting, the other is about to sit down.

Sitting: you're the one who had the fight (pick a way in which your parent was completely unreasonable); other: you're trying to mend the fences.

Introspective: Think about big fights you've had with family members and what it would be like to cut them out of your life.

Question: What is it going to take to get them back onto speaking terms?