

XY



VUXENSPEL

Frederik Berg



WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT

XY is a story about a group of people all suffering from a terrible psychological disorder called Alexithymia—the lack of understanding of own and others' emotions. In a support group for people suffering from this condition, they try to figure out how this thing with emotions work.

By playing out scenes where they are faced with a situation that otherwise would have prompted an emotional response, they play back the situation and try to, with each others' help, to understand the emotions at stake.

At the end it is not the characters that have learned something, but the players.

Duration: 2-3 hours, depending on number of players.

Genre: Psychodrama, Jeepform.

Number of Players: 4-8

Facilitator: One

Difficulty: Hard

Written by Frederik Berg during 2014-2016 in Malmö, Sweden.

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Alexithymia is a real diagnosis, and also this game's fictive pretense. XY is really about something else; **XY is a game about men.** About how men are socialized to not show and understand own and others' emotions. It is a toxic ideal that poisons the capability of many men to live meaningful lives.

It is about my fathers generation and the generations before him. It is about my generation. It is about how men are taught not to cry, to man up, to not show emotions **because showing emotions is a sign of weakness**, and weakness is the hallmark of feminity in the macho ideal.

This is not to say that men do not have emotions (as in the case of Alexithyma) or that all their emotions are stumped. Some emotions are encouraged in the macho ideal such as anger or jealousy just to take some examples. However, reducing the spectrum of emotive feelings to just a few, becomes a problem when you interact with others who *can* communicate with a full emotional spectrum. More often than not, the replay when encountered with this, is either silence, distancing, or lashing out. It is the classic fight or flight situation with the added bonus of just ignoring the problem. Regardless of what tactic chosen it leaves the other part dissatiated and without any kind of true resolvement. Enter relational problems.

The only times when men shows emotions are while drunk, crying and hugging their best friends, expressing anger when someone trespasses their boundaries or faced with extreme situations that could melt even the coldest heart.

Except...if you're suffing from Alexithymia, your heart never melts.

This game is about showing a different path, a path where empathy and understanding is the way forward.

It is about being human. **Also, it is about time.**

WHAT IS REALLY WRONG WITH US?

ALEX, THE THERAPIST

Often playing a psychotherapist can be very boring as the role exists only to pry out the good story from the players.

In XY your role as Alex is way more dynamic. You are the group leader. You have all the answers and you take players through all the exercises, guiding them toward greater self awareness, equipping them with a toolbox through which they can understand themselves and each other.

How you specifically want to portray Alex is up to you and what you feel comfortable with.

The same goes for the structure or process of the game. Use the guidelines herein as guidelines. Take the game and make it your own, but please respect what the game aims for.

Alexithymia is this game's central turning point. In this game the players are pretending to be someone else that suffers from Alexithymia. In here they can pretend to be void of emotions, to want to feel but being unable. In real life most people have somewhat of an emotional spectrum and many of the exercises and scenes that the players will play through will prompt an emotional response. Thus the player is caught in the trap of by feeling something during the game, you are essentially breaking character. This will come in handy later as part of the whole release or climax of the game.

What is going to happen is that all players will be in the hands of Alex, who is running group therapy sessions for people suffering from Alexithymia. As such Alex is not important. You as the facilitator or game master will play this part.

*When we leave, we bring
the emotions with us*

The game consist of 3 core scenes with an optional scene thrown in to create a break from the format, as well as the events surrounding the support group. This is where Alex gets to shine. The players will play out the scenes according to the instructions given in the text and conveyed by Alex. The players will play the scenes out as a way of exercising emotive play. All scenes are fictitious in the fiction and not belonging to a specific character.

The game is not really over when the game ends. Hopefully, the players have learned something from the experience. Either by being coached or coaching. Learning to understand and express a more varied range of emotions.

CHARACTERS

In XY you play an undefined sufferer of Alexithymia. The players are asked for a name—they can use their own—or any name they want. A sufferer of Alexithymia can be of any gender and any sexual orientation; it doesn't really matter.

The character as such is unimportant in the grand perspective of things. In XY the character is a vector—or a tool—for the game to do its thing.

A. Welcome to Group Therapy...

Create a common ground for the players and introduce the rules and why they are here. Everyone sits down initially.

1. Alexithymia Alex introduces itself and reifies why they are here: “**In the group you want to learn to understand your own emotions and to understand others’ emotions.**”

2. Hello We take round introducing ourselves by name, saying “**My name is [name]. I have Alexithymia.**” Let Alex underscore that if you want to remain anonymous, feel free to make up a name.

3. Rules of the Group Alex levels the playing field for the group as a safe space by introducing three rules:

- a. Be respectful.
- b. Don’t be afraid.
- c. There is room for everyone here.

3. The Hug Everyone gets up to do a small exercise to set the problem in perspective. Everyone needs to hug one another. Say something like “**I know this is hard for some of you, but try and try again.**” Rotate until all players have hugged each other for at least 20 seconds.

4. The Heart Stand in a circle, ask the characters to close their eyes and visualize the core of their emotions in the center. “**This is the heart, this is where we will rest.**” Let them open their eyes and look get eye contact with each other.

5. Goal Alex states the goal of the meeting: “**When we leave we bring the emotions with us out.**” Let the characters repeat this after Alex.

B. The Wedding Speech

Situation: “This is a wedding, you are getting married. You are holding your speech to your beloved. Try to understand **ourselves** and how to express our feelings of love and joy towards this person.”

Alex’s Notes

In this scene we explore expressing emotions and have players act out.

The intention is to have the characters fail and have the watching characters ‘fill in the blanks’.

This **scene is repeated** until everyone has tried both positions and **learned** from the exercise

Instructions

Two at a time, characters play out this scene while maintaining eye contact with the other while the others observe.

After the speech, the other player describes the feelings they felt based of the other player’s speech.

The other characters give their thoughts on how each performing character could have felt.

C. You cheated!

Situation: “Let’s explore some more complex emotions. You cheated for the first time and got found out. Let’s try to understand ***The Other*** and go through emotions like sorrow or anger.”

Alex’s Notes

In this scene we explore understanding the emotions of the Other. Important in this scene to let the other talk.

The tricky part is **how to react appropriately** the emotions of the betrayed part.

Repeat this scene until everyone has tried both positions.

Instructions

Two at a time, characters play out this scene while the others **divide themselves** evenly among the active players, giving support using the techniques described later.

After the scene, the other players describe the feelings they felt based of the other player’s speech.

The other characters give their thoughts on how each performing character could have felt.

[Optional] Players take turns relating a dream they had. Debate the significance.

D. Intermezzo - A Dream

E. The Burial

Situation: “Now, let’s explore something really bad. An infant died and you’re all at the funeral. Let’s try to explore a thing called empathy and how emotions can heal if we let them.”

Alex’s Notes

In this final exercise we’ll explore empathy. Being able to understand and relate to others’ emotions.

The tricky part is **how to distinguish between sympathy and empathy.**

This scene does not repeat, but plays out by giving the players ample opportunity to share, empathize and play out.

Instructions

All players are active. Let them run the scene themselves, taking the initiative themselves. The idea is to let the players work themselves up emotionally.

Once you feel the scene is over, ask if everyone is done and take a minute.

Ask people to sit and let Alex end the session. Refer to the section **THE END** for instructions on how to exit.

THOUGHTS AND TECHNIQUES

The game operates on two levels: One is the internal world of Alex's therapy sessions and what goes on there and the other is your world as a game master.

Some of this feels a bit new-agey and is to a certain degree. However the setting of the game exists within this framework and the tools are useful in regards to what the game wants to achieve. So bear with me.

Repetition

Repeat scenes as to 'get them right' and practice. Practicing is more important than getting the scene 'right'. Encourage the characters to ask each other "Did I get this right?" (Y/N). Coupled with this question

Willingness

Nothing will happen to the players if they do not play ball. Encourage the players to go with the flow, to embrace the game and be open toward what is going to happen. Regardless of the player's stance towards the game, the character is the gateway to the game and it is through the character that the player is reached.

Empathy

On the next page you can see the four core mechanics of the game. All participants have some tools that can increase the intimacy or sense of belonging in the group.

1. Eye contact
2. Touch
3. Symmetry
4. Affirmation.

Using the Techniques

The techniques are best used discretely. Don't use them explicitly as metatechniques where you use them as the gamemaster, use them instead from the perspective of Alex.

Alex is your tool or excuse to keep the techniques operating on a diegetic level; that is within the fictional world of the group therapy session.

1. Eye contact

Use eye contact when speaking or interacting. Eye contact transmits a sense of being understood, listened to, and connect to the other person. Combine this with the other tools listed below.

Examples to use is to have people look each other in the eyes two and two, swap partners and repeat. Whenever the players are doing something one-on-one maintaining eye contact is important, but don't confuse eye contact with staring (which is unpleasant)

2. Touch

The body responds to touch and simply touching each other can give both people engaged in this activity a sense of belonging, being accepted and valued.

Examples to use are holding hands, holding each others shoulders, and hugging. Don't rush and remember to respect the players' boundaries.

3. Symmetry

Symmetry. By mirroring each other the players will convey a sense of being understood. It is a very subtle, but effective way of building trust.

Examples to use it to have players match each others' small movements. It could be angling your head slowly to one side and back. Posing in the same way as the others.

4. Affirmation.

This is where it all leads to: The feeling of being understood and validated. This is what all these physical tools do. Adding verbal components to this emphasises this and spells out what is happening on a physical level.

Examples of using verbal expressions are things like using a person's name, greeting the person, but also agreeing with or repeating what the person just said.

And don't worry if you can't remember all this. It is your game and the things you remember are the important parts.

THE END

After the excercises have concluded, let the characters sit and breathe for a minute. They characters have gone through three distinct types of emotive behaviour and a range of different emotions.

1. **Understanding Oneself**
2. **Understanding The Other**
3. **Empathizing with others.**

Alex will most likely mention this before moving on to the last part; **the exit**

The Exit

Everyone repeats after Alex: “**When I leave I bring the emotions with me.**” Repeat this a couple of times.

Have the players stand up and join a circle, let them visualize the heart in the middle as before with their eyes closed. Let Alex say something like: “**This is the heart, this is where we rest.**” Breathe in and out slowly a couple of times, **and as the gamemaster** let the players know that once they open their eyes the game is over.

The End.

AFTERCARE

Remember to take care of your players after the game has ended. What I am describing here is the **worst case scenario**, but you’ll most likely end somewhere before that. Also, if you already haven’t, now might be a good time to talk about what the game was really about.

I suggest you take the time necessary to make everyone land properly. After an emotional experience with shifting identities, it can take some time getting back to who you were before the game, but really this is mostly about sending the player off in the right direction-

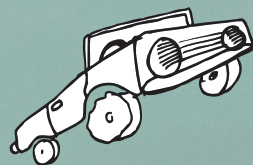
The main goal is to get the players out of character and to let them leave with the positive experiences intact and any negative stuff rendered harmless. This is not because I do not want players to handle the bad stuff, it is just that often, **describing or focusing on negative stuff actually strengthens the negative experience** either for player affected or the other players.

1. **Let them describe their experience in positive terms.** Let players focus on what they liked, what they got out of the game, what inspired them and made them think about.
2. **Talk about the technical things.** What was difficult to play, what was easy, what did they feel have the best effect. Keep things on a meta level.

As the facilitator of the game, it is your job to listen and be attentive. It is really important that you let the players talk. You do not need to have an answer to everything, but most often it is just the fact **that someone listens** that helps.

Oh, and all of the above goes for you as well.

Vi åker Jeep



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