

Parts:

A TTRPG about Structural Dissociation

Content Warning: This game is about mental health and trauma. All players should know each other reasonably well and be comfortable discussing their vulnerabilities with each other. Before playing, all players should discuss what topics they're comfortable or uncomfortable covering and form a safety plan on how to address potential triggers. Every session should end with a debrief.

Disclaimer: This game is based on the author's personal experience having dissociative identity disorder and is supplemented with information from did-research.org and Wikipedia. Presentations of structural dissociation will vary from person to person so this game cannot possibly capture every experience of it. The author has suggested some different play styles to represent different forms of structural dissociation.

Players: any number, as long as you have a GM and at least two players (alters)

Materials: a D4 and this rule sheet, character sheet, and someplace to take notes

Introduction: The players are all alters in a system with dissociative identity disorder, or DID. You begin the game dissociated and begin playing asynchronously in one-on-one sessions with the GM. Your goal is to become less dissociated and eventually all characters will get to play at the same time. The goal of the game is for all alters to resolve a shared Trauma by losing dissociation points.

Set-Up

To begin the game, the GM and players gather for a synchronous session. During this stage of play, you will learn about the body and establish a setting. The *body* represents the person that all of *alters* are contained in: if a person with DID is a pie, the body is the pie as a whole and the alters are individual slices of it. The body is the shared identity of the players, and the players' characters are each an alter within the body.

Begin the game by establishing safety. Identify any triggers the players, including the GM, may have and establish any topics that should be avoided. Make a safety plan for what happens if things get too heavy and someone needs to take a break or stop playing altogether. Each session should end with aftercare, so also establish what that might look like for each person. Once that's done, you may begin playing.

The GM should suggest a general setting. The players can negotiate the particulars of their setting's place and time. In the author's opinion it would be best to play within a realistic setting if you want to understand the real-world implications of living with structural dissociation. From now on, the setting will be referred to as the *outer world* (as opposed to the inner world, which we'll get to later).

The GM should then assign the body an identity: a name, age, gender, sex, sexuality, religion, class, height, weight, disability status, etc. The players have no say in the body's identity. They should note these facts about the body on their own character sheets.

Also, decide on a shared *trauma*. In game terms, a trauma is a difficult thing that happened to the body and explains the reason for the structural dissociation. The trauma should be something that could conceivably cause DID in the real world. DID trauma triggers are typically things that happened repeatedly or over a long period of time during early childhood. For the purposes of this game, your trauma should be relatively broad. Below is a list of suggested trauma. You can either roll a die to randomly pick one, agree on one together, or

write your own.

Example traumas:

- Mean Parent (one or both parents emotionally abused you)
- Dangerous Parent (one or both parents physically abused you)
- Persistent Hunger (you did not have enough food or other resources)
- Chronic Illness (you were often sick)
- War (you experienced warfare or political violence)
- Religious Punishment (you experienced religious or spiritual abuse)
- Discrimination (you have a marginalized identity and have experienced repeated discrimination for it)

Your goal will be to collectively resolve the trauma by losing dissociation points.

Collectively give the body a list of 15-20 *skills*. There are three categories of skills: *defenses*, *coping mechanisms*, and *talents*. There should be at least 5 skills per category. Each of them works slightly differently mechanically. Some examples are listed below but players should feel free to choose their own.

Defenses are emotional reactions to difficult situations. Some example defenses are:

- Repression: undesirable wants and ideas are no longer conscious
- Regression: falling back into a previous stage of development
- Projection: an undesirable emotion or want is ascribed to someone else
- Reaction formation: an extreme reaction that is the opposite of how you actually feel or what you actually want
- Rationalization: justifying your feelings or decisions through logic

Using a defense allows a player to automatically succeed at an action. Alternatively, a character can temporarily shed a defense to lose dissociation points. Doing so will make it harder to get through difficult tasks, but it will also bring you closer to meeting other alters.

Coping Mechanisms are behaviors you do to get through a difficult situation. Example coping mechanisms are:

- seeking social support
- humor
- drinking alcohol
- self-injury
- procrastination

You should have a mix of helpful and hurtful coping mechanisms. At the beginning of the game, when you have maximum dissociation points, you will only have access to the hurtful versions coping mechanisms. Once you have half or fewer dissociation points you will be able to use a helpful coping mechanism.

And finally, talents are general abilities your character has, such as:

- painting
- rock climbing
- math
- reading
- memorizing trivia

Using a talent adds a +1 modifier to an action's potential outcome.

Character Creation

After the body is agreed upon, the players will split up and make their character sheets one-on-one with the GM, without consulting each other. In this stage you are developing your alters.

First, decide on some basic facts about your alter: name, age, gender, pronouns and what you look like. The GM should guide each player in fleshing out their alter's identity and how it relates to the shared trauma. An alter can be literally anything or anyone. They can be very different from the body, or very similar to it. As long as the alter is related, in some way, to the trauma, there are no limits on what one can be.

Your character should also have some kind of *desire*, which is a goal you wish to accomplish that directly relates to the shared trauma. For example, if the body experienced neglect, the desire may be to be taken care of. During each session of play, the character's goal should be to fulfill their desire.

Each alter should also decide on a specific *traumatic event* that happened to them. The traumatic event should relate directly to the shared trauma. For example, if the trauma is chronic illness, the traumatic event might be a time you had to go to the hospital due to complications from your illness. This is not a mechanic but is a way to guide the player's choices.

Now, create an *inner world*. The inner world is a space in which your alter lives inside of the body's consciousness. The inner world should relate to the alter's identity in some way and should provide a place of refuge from the outer world. The inner world can be any kind of place. It could be narrow and specific, like a room in a house, or more broad, like a fantasy universe. The GM should guide the player in describing what their inner world looks like and how the alter interacts with it. The inner world should be reasonably fleshed out, but it will also be expanded upon throughout the game.

The player should pick several skills from the chart made earlier. An alter should start with 3 defenses, 2 coping mechanisms, and one skill. The GM should not reveal anything about the other players' skill choices. Before beginning game-play, you should think of how your trauma and identity shaped your skills.

An alter also begins with 20 *dissociation points*. Your goal is to *lose* dissociation points by successfully navigating difficult situations. As you do so, you will also get to meet the other alters.

Finally, each player should also keep a *journal*. You will use this to keep track of the information you learn about other alters. It starts off completely blank. Most players will probably, at the very least, know how many other alters there are, but you could experiment with finding ways to obscure even that information.

Game Play

In the beginning, the game is played asynchronously: sessions are one-on-one between the GM and a given alter. The GM can decide who gets to go first and what order players take their turns in (rolling a die might help). Sessions consist of two phases: one in the outer world, and one in the inner world. During each phase, described in more detail later, the alter will go through a series of challenges that require them to use their skills in order to shed dissociation points.

When the first session starts, the GM should set the mood of the session and place the alter in a situation in the outer world. The GM should introduce and expand upon the setting that was agreed upon earlier, posing some kind of challenge the alter must overcome. The challenge should be something stressful that creates an obstacle to the alter satisfying their desire.

Here's an example. The outer world – the setting – is that the body is in high school. The body's trauma is abuse by a caregiver. The alter's desire is to live up to their parents' expectations for them. A traumatic event that happened to the alter is that as a child, they got into a huge fight with their parents over failing a class. When the session starts, the body is in math class taking an exam. If they fail, they will disappoint their parents.

The alter must decide how to act and respond to the situation. The GM and alter should have a conversation about what the alter does, and how they think and feel. The GM should carefully ask guiding questions to help the player understand their alter better.

The first phase of play takes place in the outer world: this is what the alter literally *does*, using one of their skills. During this phase, a player can either use a defense, coping mechanism, or talent. There are different consequences depending on the type of skill used:

- If a player uses a defense, they automatically succeed at a challenge, but they will not be able to shed a defense at the end of the turn.
- If a player uses a coping mechanism, they will get a +2 modifier to succeeding at an action. If the alter has half or more of their total dissociation points, they can only use an unhealthy coping mechanism, which will cause them to gain +1 dissociation point. If the alter has fewer than half of their dissociation points, they can use a healthy coping mechanism and will lose -1 dissociation point.
- If a player uses a talent, they will gain a +1 modifier to the action's outcome, or +2 if it is relevant to the task at hand.

Once the player narrates their alter's action, which should relate to trying to fulfill their desire, they roll a D6 to determine the outcome, based on the following chart:

1. Catastrophic failure: The player fails the action and gains 2 dissociation points.
2. Medium failure: The player fails the action and gains 1 dissociation point.
3. Normal failure: The player only fails the action and does not gain or lose dissociation points.
4. Normal success: The player only succeeds at the action and does not gain or lose dissociation points.
5. Medium success: The player succeeds at an action and loses 1 dissociation point.
6. Perfect success: The player succeeds at an action and gains 2 dissociation points.

Based on the outcome of the dice roll, the GM narrates what happens next, keeping in mind the trauma and desire. The player should describe how they emotionally respond to the situation.

This ends the outer world phase of play and begins the inner world. A player's goal in the inner world is to try and reach other alters. They can explore the inner world and try to reach the other alters by asking a *question* about one of them. If the alter failed in the previous phase, the GM can only reveal a hint about another alter. If the alter succeeded in the previous phase, the GM can honestly and fully answer the player's question. The alter should record the GM's responses in their journal.

Once both phases are complete, the player can choose to shed a defense if they did not use one. They will not be able to use this defense on the next turn, but they will lose an additional dissociation point. If the alter experienced a catastrophic failure, the action becomes a new traumatic event and the alter gains a new negative trigger. If the alter experienced a perfect success, they gain a positive trigger.

The session ends and play moves on to the next alter, repeating the steps above. The next event should take place immediately after the previous one. For example, after Alter A takes the exam, Alter B might go to their next class. A round is complete when all players have had a turn with the GM.

In between rounds, the GM should assess how many dissociation points each alter has and can decide if any are ready to meet. The GM can decide how many points are necessary to lose in order to meet another alter –

ideally, the exact number would depend on how many players there are and how quickly they want the game to go. Alters can only meet if they have the same number of requisite dissociation points.

Once alters have met, they can play sessions together. They take separate turns but can collaborate on decisions and make use of each other's skills. However, they must still work to fulfill their individual desires each turn.

The more alters that meet, the more complicated relationships become. Alter A might know Alter B, but not Alter C, while Alters B and C might know each other. In this case, communications between alters must remain private. Players A and C can both be present for the session, but Alter B cannot reveal their alters' identities to each other. This could be done by sending a text or going to a separate room together.

The next round can either pick up immediately after what happened in the previous round, or the GM can teleport or time skip the body.

The goal should be for every character to lose all of their dissociation points so that the trauma is resolved and all Alters are playing together.

Alternate Play Styles:

- Extended play: If the trauma is resolved but players want to continue the game, the GM can introduce a new trauma and the players can continue working together as an integrated system. You could also introduce new dissociated parts in the preexisting system and keep playing until the new alters have lost their dissociation points.
 - Each alter could be a different version of the same person: for example, have the same name and basic identity, but be different ages or have different personalities.
 - Players could begin with some co-consciousness and sessions could begin with some collaboration allowed.
 - Players could control subsystems of multiple alters at a time.
 - Instead of working toward health multiplicity and maintaining several alters at the end of the game, the players could instead try for final fusion and merge their alters into one. In this style, all players would eventually share a single character sheet and make decisions through consensus.
 - Not all players know the body's identity at first and instead must learn about it through their interactions with the outer world.
 - There could be multiple traumas in play at a time. In this case, each character would have multiple desires and multiple traumatic events.
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Character Sheet

The Body

Name:

Age:

Gender & Pronouns:

Other:

Skills

Defenses	Coping Mechanisms	Talents

The Alter

Name:

Age:

Gender & Pronouns:

Other:

Desire:

Traumatic Event:

Inner World:

Skills:

Dissociation Points: