

Em-BEAR-rassment

Game Design1 - Fall 2015

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Overview:

It's hard to deal with EMBARRASSMENT--but it's easier when it's shared! Move along a track by doing embarrassing things, and go further by NEGOTIATING with others to get someone else to cooperate with you. Em-BEAR-assment is a social party game, particularly fun to play when you want to get to know someone a little better. Whether used as an ice-breaker between strangers or to develop a relationship with someone you already know, you are certain to learn a thing or two about your fellow players.

You are being chased through a forest by a bear. The only way to escape into the safety of the treehouse? Embarrass yourself! Or better yet, negotiate for rewards in exchange for helping someone else embarrass themselves. Dance, sing, stroke, and compliment your way to safety.

Worried? Don't be! Em-BEAR-assment makes sure that you are playing with the opt-in kind of embarrassment, and that you consent to any sort of ridiculous shenanigans the game entails. Try not to be too shy though, as our bear seems to have an appetite for wallflowers.

Em-BEAR-assment works with all kinds of actions, embarrassing in all kinds of different ways hopefully finding the actions that lie just on the boundaries of what you feel comfortable doing.

Looking for a more intimate experience? Keep an eye out for the expansion pack *Couples and Chasing and Bear! (Oh My!)* designed specifically to spice up your romantic life. Coming this spring.

Players: 4

Materials:

- 20 Embarrassment Cards
- 20 1-dollar bills
- 1 Board
- 1 Bear
- 4 Player markers
- 1 Timer capable of noting 10 and 30-second increments
- 16 voting cards, in 4 sets labeled 1-4

Objective:

Reach the end of the board (marked “Safe Zone”) without getting caught by the bear. Everyone who does so wins!

Setup:

1. Put the board in the center of the table, within easy reach of all players.
2. Shuffle the Embarrassment Cards, and put them face-down near the board.
3. Have the players each choose a player marker. Put the markers and the bear on the “Start” space.
4. Give each player five 1-dollar bills.
5. Give each player one set of voting cards.
6. The first player is the player who has most recently done something embarrassing.

Gameplay:

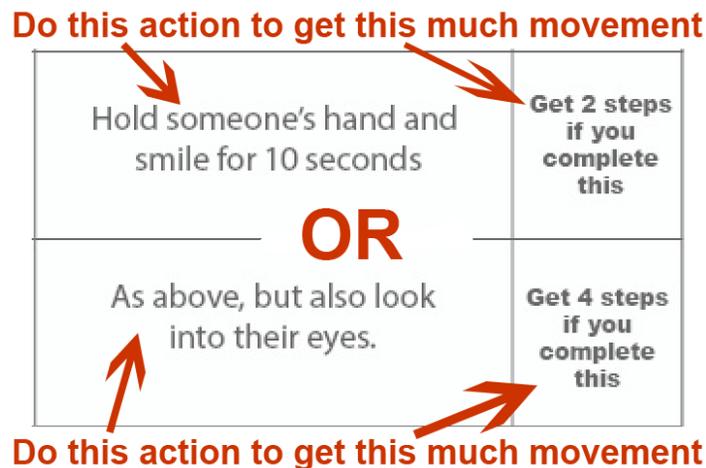
During your turn, you will **DRAW** a card, and then either **DO** an action on it or **SELL** it. The action will **MOVE** one or more player tokens around the board. Finally, the dinosaur will **CHASE** the players.

1. DRAW

Take the top Embarrassment Card.

2. DO or SELL

Every card has two actions you can accomplish to move forward on the track. Each action provides a number of steps of movement noted to the right of the action.



Read the card aloud to the other players. Then decide whether you would like to do one of the actions on the card, or try to sell the card. You have 30 seconds to make this choice.

Doing the action

Choose one of the actions on the card to do. The other action will not be part of this game.

If your chosen action involves another person, you must get someone to work with you by negotiating with the other players. You can offer (or request) dollar bills, divide up the movement you will get if you succeed, promise future teamwork, or make any other arrangement that can be completed entirely within the game. You have 30 seconds to negotiate; at that point, you must accept a current offer if there are any.

Example: You can ask someone to give you two in-game dollar bills in return for helping them with an action. You cannot ask for two real dollar bills.

Example: You can offer someone one of the steps of movement you will get for doing an action successfully in return for 1 in-game dollar bill and their assistance in completing the task.

If an action explicitly involves another person, you **must** negotiate with them and receive their consent before doing the action. You may **not** involve another person in doing an action otherwise.

If you are unable to acquire a partner, discard the card and go back to **DRAW**.

After any requisite negotiations, do the action you have chosen.

Selling the card

If you do not want to do either action on the card, you can offer the card up for sale. You have 30 seconds to negotiate a sale with any willing buyer, following the same rules as negotiating for a partner.

When you sell a card, you sell the entire card to a single buyer; you cannot split it between multiple buyers. The buyer must then choose one of the actions on it, negotiate for any needed partner, and do the action as described in *Doing the action* above.

If you cannot find a buyer, discard the card and go back to **DRAW**.

3. MOVE

Most cards allow you (or the person who bought the card, if you sold it) to move a fixed number of steps after completing the action. Move the marker for the player who completed the action forward that many spaces. If that player traded some or all of the movement to another player during negotiations, move the markers of the players involved according to the terms of their deal.

Some cards involve a vote. For those cards, all players *not* involved in doing the action say “1-2-3” and, on “3,” hold up one of their voting cards that is within the range listed for the action. The number of steps awarded is the *highest* number any player holds up. Move the marker for the player who completed the action, and/or the markers of players they negotiated with, according to the terms of any deal.

When all movement is complete, play passes to the left from the person who originally drew the card.

Money Movement

You can give 3 dollars back to the bank at any time to move one space forward.

4. CHASE

When play is about to pass back to the starting player, the bear moves forward to the next-closest space marked with a bear paw, stopping in each space along the way.

Any player whose marker is in a space the bear stops in is out of the game! Discard their marker and dollar bills.

Strategy Tip for New Players!

Don't let other players be eliminated early! Every player eliminated is one fewer player you can work with, and when their money leaves the game it's harder for everyone to negotiate.

How to Win

Reach the space marked “Safe Zone” without being caught by the bear! More than one player can win. The game ends when all players have either reached the Safe Zone or been removed from the game by the bear.

Reward for Players in the Safe Zone

If you are in the Safe Zone you do not take turns yourself. You do not **DRAW**, **DO** actions by yourself, **SELL** cards, or **MOVE** your marker.

However, you can still work with other players who are not in the Safe Zone to complete actions. During these negotiations, you get a special benefit: *you can ask for things outside the game.*

Example: A player in the Safe Zone can say “I’ll do that with you if you buy me a Coke from the vending machine.”

There are still two **limits** on what you can ask for:

1. You cannot ask for anything illegal.
2. You cannot ask for anything that would violate a code of academic integrity.

Strategy Tip for New Players!

Try not to be last to reach the Safe Zone! It gets harder to make progress as more players arrive there and can drive a harder bargain!

FAQ

Q: A vote produced fewer steps of movement than are required to satisfy a deal. What happens?

A: Move the player in possession of the card first, up to the number of steps they were entitled to under the deal. Then use any remaining steps to move other players, satisfying each one’s requirements under the deal clockwise around the table.

Q: The Embarrassment Cards ran out. What happens?

A: Reshuffle the Embarrassment Cards to form a new deck, and continue play.

Design Statement:

Em-BEAR-rassment was a surprisingly difficult design challenge. Our design constraints were embarrassment and negotiation. Our first design focused on four themes of embarrassment: intimacy, disclosure, failure, and public performance. Using these four themes, we designed a game that embraces embarrassment, rather than using it as punishment.

Our initial design made use of four decks of cards, one for each theme of embarrassment. On a player's turn, they used a spinner to determine which deck of cards they would pick from. From this point, the play was very similar to our current rules. They could bid on the card with money, promises, or points (spaces eventually replaced points). The bidding and negotiation of the game mitigated the chance of the card draw; players who got cards with actions they did not want could sell it and buy one later on. We wanted to push people's comfort zone but not tear it apart. We also pushed negotiation further by making $\frac{2}{3}$ of the final cards require a partner. Once a single player reached 10 points, the game ended. Whoever was in last place at that point was the loser, and everyone else won; having several winners allowed people to negotiate with the current leader.

After numerous playtests, a few issues became very clear. Thematically it made sense to have a single loser. It also kept the negotiation system from falling apart because sharing points with the leader was not detrimental for anyone except the last-place player. Unfortunately, our scoring system did not reinforce that only one person lost. People still played selfishly with their votes and did not negotiate when it was strategically advantageous to do so right up to the end of the game, when they were reminded of the victory condition.

We needed to retheme the game to fit our design goals. A quote came to our minds that thematically fit our "last place, loses" approach very really well: "You don't have to run faster than the bear to get away. You just have to run faster than the person next to you." Points were replaced with spaces and a circular board was created along with an enemy bear. There were a few key differences between our final game and this circular board: the game ended as soon as one player was "eaten," and the bear started 4-5 spaces away and slowly sped up.

The core mechanics of negotiating and performing embarrassing acts worked great in this system. The key problem was balancing the movements of the bear and players so they eventually converged, but at an unpredictable rate. Without making extremely complicated bear movement rules, the bear would either be too far away for most of the game and then eat everyone, or it would eat a player right away and end the game prematurely. In both of these cases, the micro choices of negotiating and performing tasks began to feel meaningless. Each turn felt like the previous one.

After spending half of the week iterating on this balancing issue, we came up with the idea of hybridizing the original game and the circular-board version. The first result of that change was to create a much nicer pacing. There are, at most, four rounds. By the end of the fourth round,

everyone will either have escaped or have been eaten by the bear. Space movement has likewise been well balanced, but varied. The card movement comes out, on average, to 2 or 3 spaces of movement a turn. A few outliers exist of 1 or 4 space movement as well. This properly balanced the game to have 2-4 rounds of play before ending.

Finally, we dropped the game ending when one player was caught. We wanted to assure the game never ends prematurely due to an "unlucky" deck order. The new version also keeps players involved. It is in each player's interests to prevent the others from either finishing early or being eaten. This is because the opposing player's money and negotiating power leaves with them.

These varied card movements, and potential negotiations, cause multiple layers of tension, strategy, and negotiation to guarantee the survival of your piece. The randomness of the card movement now works to the system's benefit to allow varied sessions each and every playthrough, without breaking the game's system. This final system results in an awkward performance game that works for multiple styles of play, purely competitive trying to stop each other, or cooperative to have everyone survive!

