

PICKING UP THE PIECES



A TWO PLAYER TTRPG BY SUMMER



PICKING UP THE PIECES

A two-player game about exploring a broken relationship and deciding, after all is said and done, if you want to fix it.

What You Will Need

- + A piece of paper & pencil
- + 6-10 notecards
- + 2d6 (two six-sided die)
- + 1-3 hours

The person sitting across from you hurt you.

They hurt you, you thought, beyond reconciliation. When you look into their eyes there's no denying the pain and resentment in your heart.

You remember some days when they were the only one who brought you happiness — you probably remember them too well. But that's over now.

After some time apart, you've come together again to lay your cards on the table, air your grievances and hopefully, begin to mend what was broken.

You want this to work and you know they do too.

That doesn't mean it will. But you have to try.

A Note About Play

It is highly encouraged you read the rules (aloud) to one another all the way through before beginning play.

Alternate paragraphs or take turns however you see fit. Open communication and understanding prior to laying out your Pieces is crucial to fluid game-play. Take your time, settle qualms and confusions before beginning.

*If you both agree to **all** the rules and feel comfortable beginning play, please do so. Remember that when you begin play, you are consenting to the conversation at hand. Consent can be withdrawn at any time by either player.*

Content & Trigger Warning

While you and your partner have total control over the content introduced in Picking Up the Pieces, the game may lead to

- + potential loss of a loved one*
- + potential mentions of abuse, both emotional and physical*
- + tension, arguments & hard conversations.*

Picking Up the Pieces is a game that will allow you to explore a broken relationship. You and your partner will be given the tools and the opportunity to work through your issues, past and present.

When all is said and done you may wish to work toward a relationship renewed. You may part ways, never to speak again.

What your relationship was like before the fall-out is up to you. You might have been lovers, siblings, best friends or something else. But whatever you were, you cared for and loved one another deeply. Maybe you still do.

Begin by discussing your previous relationship with your partner. Address what you were as well as what you weren't. *For example, you may have been mother and child, but that doesn't necessarily mean you were friends.*

Names, genders, appearance and the rest are not necessary to decide immediately, though you may find those details helpful in play. If you wish, name yourself now.

Write your relationship and any other relevant information on your Character Card. (A piece of paper or note card will do.)

Do not discuss the final event that drove you apart.

During play it's possible you will come across situations that feel unfair or upsetting to one or both of you. Take time to address those feelings both in and out of character as they come. Stay vigilant. Put the care of your partner and yourself above all else.

Once you've decided the nature of your relationship and other relevant information, establish which safety tools you'd like to use with your partner. The ones recommended for play are listed below — but use whatever is most comfortable for you both.

Line and Veils

Lines and Veils are used prior to game-play to set boundaries in play. Use a sheet of paper or online document to record these where they are easily accessible to both players.

Lines are hard limits that should never come up in play. Setting content as a line means that neither player should try and introduce those themes in play. Some examples may include sexism, homophobia, children in danger and other triggers for past, out of game relationships. Talk with your partner to make sure that your lines are exhaustive.

Veils are softer limits or things that are okay as long as they happen off screen. 'Fade to Black' on content that comes up in play to invoke the veil. Setting content as a veil means the partners aren't against having that content in the game, but it does mean they don't want it spotlighted or described in detail. Some examples may include sexual intimacy, drug use, extensive gore, etc.

Your Lines and Veils should be a living document that can be updated as needed throughout play.

X, N & O Cards

The X Card can be used anytime one or both partners are not okay with the content currently happening in play. The card may be physically present between you where it is easily reached. If you wish to trigger the card, tap it. You may also cross your arms in an 'X' or type an X in chat should you be playing remotely. The two of you may now rewind, skip or change the content at will.

The N Card can be used anytime one or both partners feel that they are headed towards an X Card or a Line or Veil. The card may be physically present between you and is used in similar ways to the X Card. Tap the card, type it in chat or simply state aloud "N". If you wish, you can fade to black or push forward with frequent check-ins.

The O Card can be used anytime one or both partners wish to express their desire to move forward. When play gets heated or sad but players wish to continue to explore those emotions, they may express the O Card similarly to the X or N card. Tap a physical card between you or make an O with your fingers. You can also ask "O?" aloud as a verbal check-in with your partner.

Breaks

Breaks are moments where both partners get up, taking a step away from the game to clear their heads and recenter themselves for play. When playing *Picking Up the Pieces*, **Breaks between each Piece are highly recommended.**

Use the safety tools outlined with a heavy hand. Though exploring tense, sad and other hard emotions in play is highly encouraged — player safety is crucial. Check in with your partner frequently during play.

*Picking Up the Pieces is **not** intended to be used as a tool to mend real world relationships.*

*Special thanks to the **TTRPG Safety Toolkit** — a resource created by Kienna Shaw and Lauren Bryant-Monk. The TTRPG Safety Toolkit is a compilation of safety tools that have been designed by members of the tabletop roleplaying games community for use by players and GMs at the table. You can find the kit at bit.ly/ttrpgsafetytoolkit*

When you've decided on your relationship and have established and gone over the safety tools in use, be still with your partner. Look into each other's eyes in silence for no less than three minutes.

*While eye contact is encouraged for establishing intimacy, if it will harm your ability to be emotionally vulnerable or is otherwise not possible, please consider the **Eye Contact Variants** listed at the end of the game.*

If at any point eye contact (or any variant you may choose) becomes overwhelming, alert your partner and take a small break. Come back when you feel ready and choose another option or create your own.

This moment is meant to be filled with all the tension of your ended relationship, but remember to always put yourself (the player) above the character and story.

During this time you may reflect internally upon the issues that tore you apart. Remind yourself of how they hurt you, but remember that you are here to try and work things out — regardless of your bitterness.

If you are playing remotely — consider also putting your hand on your screen (or do anything else that helps you feel closer to them or promotes intimacy) during these three minutes.

When time is up, you may begin to fill the smoldering battlefield of your broken hearts.

Take turns naming aloud the Pieces of your life and yourself that were broken, wounded or killed outright in the fallout of your relationship.

Write them down on the note cards (one per card) and lay them out between you, filling your battlefield. These may include things such as friends, trust, creativity, sleep, a home and the like. Whatever was sacrificed when they hurt you, make it clear.

Each player should list at least 3 — making for a total of 6. For a longer game, list up to 5 each — making for a total of 10.

If you are unsure where to begin, feel free to take inspiration from the following playsets, altering and adding Pieces as you wish.

A Decade of Memories

Pieces Lost:

Trust, A Place to Call Home, Love, Intimacy

Parent and Child

Pieces Lost:

Feeling of Safety, Understanding, Shared Meals, Support (Financial or Moral)

Burnt Out Bright

Pieces Lost:

Self-Respect, Money, Friends, Thirst for Adventure

Ex-Friends

Pieces Lost:

Our Spot, Excitement, Ambition, Humor

When you are ready to continue — set the scene in which this fateful conversation takes place. It may be a family home, public space, or somewhere private only you two know. When you feel ready, the player who wishes to will pick up the first Piece. The player who picked up the Piece becomes the **Sling** and follows these four steps.

Step One

Choose any Piece and pick it up, reading it aloud. *Do not let which partner lay the Piece on the battlefield affect your decision.*

Step Two

The **Sling** should now ask their partner (hereafter referred to as the **Stone**) to describe the exact moment this Piece fell under fire. Regardless of who originally lay the Piece on the field, the **Stone** has ultimate say over how and when it was first damaged. You may find yourself putting words in your partner's mouth. That's to be expected in a conversation such as this.

The **Sling** may make offerings, suggestions or interruptions beginning with the phrase *"that's not exactly how I remember it..."* However the **Stone** can take or leave these suggestions as truths, lies or misunderstandings — make it known which. Be gracious and kind, even when you disagree.

When describing the moment the chosen Piece was laid on the battlefield, the **Stone** should set the scene exactly as they remember it. The little details count, like the way you could hear the rain on the window. Maybe how your partner's eyes glinted in the dim candle light as they destroyed you with just a word. You may ask the **Sling** questions if you wish when setting the scene, but if you are the **Stone**, take ownership over that moment — even and especially if you were the one who did the hurting.

Step Three

The **Sling** should now ask the **Stone** how the Piece could possibly be fixed. You may have found through exploration of the Piece that the **Stone** was the one who did the majority of the hurting. It may feel unfair that they are the one to offer solutions on it's repair. This is to be expected.

If it's believed nothing can be done to fix what was broken, the **Stone** should say so honestly and explain why they feel that way. The **Sling**, if determined to fix it, may offer solutions but the **Stone** is not required to entertain these ideas. If either partner wishes to end discussion on the topic simply say, *"It's in the past now. Let it lie,"* or *"I can't talk about this anymore."*

When you are finished, the **Stone** will assign the **Sling** a score of either -1, 0 or 1. Again, it doesn't matter who originally lay the Piece on the Battlefield, the **Stone** will always assign the score.

+ Assign them a -1 if: They did not listen, spoke over you, refused to make amends or made you feel inferior.

+ Assign them a 0 if: You feel the conversation went about as you expected, but did not give you hope of reconciliation.

+ Assign them a 1 if: They made you smile or made you hopeful that you may leave with a relationship on the mend.

Write your assigned score down on your Character Card now.

Step Four

When you have said all you can about the Piece that has been picked up, set it to the side. It should no longer be on the battlefield, but keep it where each partner can reference back to it. Check in and break now, need be.

When the score has been assigned and the Piece has been set aside, the **Stone** continues play by picking up the next Piece, now taking on the roll of the **Sling**.

Continue this way, picking up Pieces, explaining the circumstance of their fall and offering each other chances to fix what was broken. Continue to assign scores as the conversation continues. *(In a short game, each person will receive 3 assigned scores — in a longer game, they may receive up to 5.)*

*If at any point either partner feels that you can no longer continue with the conversation, regardless of how many pieces are left, end the game immediately and move onto **Ending Option Two**.*

When you have picked up and explained the last Piece, total your scores individually.

After you are finished, look at your partner and thank them for their time, even though it was hard.

Now that all the Pieces have been picked up off the battlefield and your score has been totaled, it's time to make your decision. How will you move forward from here with your partner?

Begin by having an open conversation about the final event that drove you apart. Who made the final decision to go your separate ways? How did you feel in those moments? Ask your partner questions and answer as honestly as possible when they ask you. Take breaks as needed or as things get heated.

When you have nothing left to say to one another — choose together from one of the two 'Ending' options below and finish the game as described. You must make and execute this decision unanimously.

Ending Option One

Should you conclude the conversation unsure of how you want your relationship to end, each partner *ROLLS 2d6 + THEIR FINAL SCORE* (as totaled from your individual assigned scores throughout the game).

In a 6 Piece game, each player should have a total score between -3 and 3.

In a 10 Piece game, each player should have a total score between -5 and 5.

Note: This method should be used if neither you nor your partner are sure how you want things to turn out. You may also decide to roll if you'd like to see what fate has in store for your character. Remember that you and your partner should both agree to this ending before rolling, understanding that you may end up with distinctly different outcomes.

On a 6 or less: You feel that there is nothing left to gain from your relationship with your partner, regardless of their desires. You know in your heart it's best you go your separate ways. Describe how the relationship permanently changed you — whether for better or worse.

On a 7-9: You know this relationship isn't over, but for now, space between you is for the best. Describe what aspects of the conversation gave you hope and which parts continue to give you pause or make you nervous. Admit whether or not you still love them.

On a 10+: You've forgiven them. Even if you can't admit it — to them or yourself — in your heart you miss them. Describe how you pursue this relationship, working hard to mend what was broken.

Epilogue further for your characters as feels appropriate. Leave nothing unsaid between players.

Ending Option Two

Forget the dice, forget the scores, you both know what you want. Tell your partner your wishes for the future along with your needs — listen as they tell you theirs. If you need to say goodbye forever, then so be it. If you want to kiss and make up, that works too.

The Pieces of you, the bits you could salvage, are back in your grasp for the moment.

So hand your heart to them once more — or don't.

Eye Contact Variants

While eye contact is the base mechanic for creating intimacy prior to playing *Picking Up the Pieces*, for some it may be significantly more difficult, impossible or triggering. If you fall into one of those categories, consider the following alternatives.

- + Sit back to back, leaning on each other and listening to each other's steady breathing for three minutes.
- + Take your partner's hand and study the lines of their palm, tracing them slowly (with consent).
- + Take turns expressing a current insecurity or anxiety, either in or out of character.
- + Look at the entirety of them, not just their eyes, but their mouth, their arms, everything. Take in the entire person.
- + Lean into your partner, touching foreheads. Place your hand on the back of their neck (with consent). Stay this way for 3 minutes or as long as you desire.

If none of the above work for you, take a few minutes to discuss ways you and your partner can create intimate, emotional closeness. Remember to also leave room for the tension and hurt of your broken relationship.

Keep in mind, if yours is only a minor aversion or feeling of discomfort at the idea of prolonged eye contact, this is to be expected. Trust in your partner and set the timer.

Aftercare

When the game is complete, check-in with your partner to see how they are feeling.

This should be an open way for you to emotionally decompress, talk through, and process the events of the session in a safe environment.

Encourage each other to practice their own form of self-care and remind one another that your mental health comes first.

Debrief, should you need, to reflect on the game and work through potential emotional bleed from the game into real life. This can happen directly after you complete the game or in the days or weeks following.

Remember that while you may recover quickly to be patient with your partner should they need more extensive aftercare. Check in with them as often as need be in the coming days.

If you are unsure where to begin with aftercare, see the following questions for inspiration.

- + What was the hardest moment for you?
- + What was your favorite moment?
- + How are you similar or different to your character?
- + What did you like about our characters' relationship?
- + Is there anything you'd like to revisit or retcon?
- + What have you learned from this game?

Thanks & Credits

Thank you for playing *Picking Up the Pieces!* I hope you enjoyed every moment.

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