Gather & Play

PRINTABLE HOST SHEET

Try Not to Laugh

Keep a perfectly straight face while the rest of the table does its best — with words alone — to make you crack.

Players 3–12 (best with 4–8) **Play time** 10–20 min **Materials** No materials **Movement** Seated

QUICK RULES

1. **One player takes the straight-face seat.**
2. **Each other player gets twenty seconds to make them laugh — words and voices only, no touching.**
3. **A smile that shows teeth, or any laugh, ends the round.**
4. **Survive the whole table to score; then the seat passes on.**

SET UP

1. Seat everyone where they can see one another's faces — round a table is ideal.
2. Agree the line: a closed-mouth smile is allowed, but showing teeth or making any sound of laughter counts as cracking.
3. Choose the first player to keep a straight face, and someone to time twenty seconds for each performer.

HOW TO PLAY

1. The straight-face player looks at each performer in turn and may not hide their face or look away.
2. Going clockwise, each performer has twenty seconds: a joke, a silly voice, a strange noise, a challenge from the host view — anything spoken or sung.
3. Performers stay in their seats and may not touch the straight-face player or use props.
4. Everything must be kind and fit for the youngest person present. Jokes about people in the room are off limits.
5. If the straight-face player cracks, the performer who did it scores a point and the round ends.
6. A straight-face player who survives every performer scores two points. Either way, the seat passes to the left.

HOW THE GAME ENDS

Play until everyone has had the straight-face seat once; with fewer than five players, go round twice. The highest score wins, and a tie is settled by a stare-out between the tied players while the rest of the table performs together.

PLAYING SEATED

Played seated by default. No step requires standing or moving.

TIPS FOR THE HOST

- Deadpan beats shouting. Tell performers that the quietest, most serious delivery usually wins.
- Keep turns to twenty seconds. A longer turn is hard on the performer, not on the straight face.
- Some people laugh at once and some never do. Praise the good attempts so that the game is not only about winning.
- If a child is in the seat, offer an easy mode — smiles of any kind are allowed, and only laughing counts.

VARIATIONS

Team stare. Two teams sit in facing rows. One team performs together for thirty seconds while the other holds straight faces; each face that cracks is a point. It is loud, quick, and good for big family tables.

Silent mode. Performers may not make a sound — faces and gestures only, still without touching and still from their own seat. It is the better version late in the evening or when little ones are asleep nearby.

STARTER IDEAS: IN A VOICE

- Read out tomorrow's weather forecast as a very tired dragon
- Sing the alphabet as a dramatic opera
- Count to ten like a robot running out of battery
- Order a pizza in the voice of a nervous owl
- Recite a nursery rhyme as a stern headteacher
- Explain the rules of this game as a sleepy sloth
- Thank everyone for coming, as a goose
- Describe the room as if you were selling it on television

STARTER IDEAS: WITH GREAT SERIOUSNESS

- Describe your breakfast as if it were breaking news
- Explain how to make a sandwich as a top-secret mission
- Introduce the person on your left as a famous explorer
- Give a sports commentary on someone at the table blinking
- Say "I am a serious potato" three times, more seriously each time
- Tell the story of your socks as a bedtime story
- Apologise to your chair for sitting on it
- Give a wedding toast to a spoon

Times are editorial estimates, not test results. Editorially checked for clarity and consistency. We do not claim group playtesting for this page.