

Happy Face, Mean Face, (Levels A-B)

PLAY

To build early emotional understanding and social engagement through a simple face-showing game paired with easy, supported movements that encourage fun, noticing others, and shared participation. There can be an option to get students to try and guess and match what facial expression the teacher or their partner will display for a bit of added fun.



Learning Intentions

Recognise simple feelings:

Students aim to notice and show two basic emotions, *happy* and *angry*.

Use simple movements safely:

Students aim to join in with basic actions (clap, tap, wiggle) with support.

Connect with a partner:

Students aim to notice another person's face and play alongside them in a positive, fun routine.



Success Criteria

I can show a happy or angry face (or point to a picture).

I can do one simple action like clapping or tapping.

I can join my partner or group during the game.



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Duration: 4 - 6 minutes

Objective

To build early emotional understanding and social engagement through a simple face-showing game paired with easy, supported movements that encourage fun, noticing others, and shared participation. There can be an option to get students to try and guess and match what facial expression the teacher or their partner will display for a bit of added fun.

What You Need

- Emotion visuals: **happy** and **angry** (found in PDF resource)
- Optional: AAC device or emotion choice board
- No physical equipment required

Setup

- Students sit or stand in pairs or it can be played in small groups.
- Teacher models both expressions clearly:
 - "This is **happy**" (big smile).
 - "This is **angry**" (gentle frown, scrunched eyebrows).
- Show emotion cards at the same time for extra support and understanding.

Gameplay / Activity Steps

1. Warm-Up: Practise Faces

Teacher shows each face:

"Show me a *happy* face."

"Show me an *angry* face."

Students respond by:

- Copying the face
- Pointing to the card
- Pressing AAC ("happy", "angry")
- Making any expressive gesture (smile, frown, sound)

Celebrate all attempts.



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2. Countdown Routine

Teacher says:

"Ready? 3... 2... 1... show!"

Students show either a **happy** or **angry** face. The teacher may want to lead with a prompt to link it with how the students are currently feeling. As the teacher, also demonstrate one of the feelings/emotions after each countdown, mix it up each time you play. If playing with the movement response, explain to the students that they can try and match which face you will display.

3. Movement Response (optional)

For some added movement and connection, if the teacher and students complete a matching action or if they don't match, the following movements can be made to signify a correct or incorrect match:

- If faces match:
 - Clap together
 - Tap knees
 - Wave hands
 - The teacher says: "Match! Yay!"
- If faces don't match:
 - Do a gentle movement such as tapping feet, tapping the chair, wiggling fingers, or shrugging shoulders
 - The teacher says: "Let's try again!"

Movements remain slow, safe, and predictable for all learners.

4. Repeat for 4 - 6 Quick Rounds

Keep pace steady and playful.

Rotate partners if using partner play to encourage several social connections.

Reflection / Debrief

Use simple visuals to prompt:

- "Show me *happy*."
- "Show me *angry*."
- "Which one did you choose the most?"
- "How are you feeling after playing this game? Happy or Angry?"

Students may respond with pointing, gesture, facial expression, AAC, or sound.



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Variations

1. Gesture-Only Version

For learners who struggle with facial expressions, allow:

- Thumbs up = happy
- Thumbs down, arms crossed or tapping chest = angry
- Pointing to visuals

2. Sensory-Friendly Version

Avoid sudden loud cheering.

Use soft movements like wiggling fingers for “match” and tapping hands for “no match”.

3. Copy-the-Teacher Version (Highly Supported)

The teacher shows a face first.

Students simply copy it instead of choosing on their own.

Builds confidence and early recognition.

4. Whole-Group Circle

Everyone shows a face at the same time.

Teacher calls:

“Everyone show *happy*! ... Everyone show *angry*!”

AAC-Specific Supports

Recommended buttons:

- happy
- angry
- yes
- no
- again

Model AAC each round:

“Show... *happy*.”

Provide extra wait time for responses.



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For Wheelchair Users / Accessibility

Replace movements as needed:

- Clap → tap wheelchair tray or tap fingers
- Stomp → tap the side of the chair
- Spin → gentle arm circles or slight shoulder turn
- High-five → air-five or fingertip tap

Ensure partners remain at eye level for easy expression and connection.

Notes for Inclusion

- Accept all expressive attempts: eye gaze, sounds, tiny muscle movements, AAC, gestures.
- Some students may prefer pointing to cards instead of making faces.
- Keep instructions short, visual, and repeated.
- Celebrate effort:
- “You showed a feeling, great job!”
- Links to Levels A-B SEL: early emotional recognition, noticing others, shared play, and building connection.



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