

3.8.3 Scopa

Brief description, and rules of the game

The game is inspired by Scopa, a traditional Italian card game in which players collect cards through matching and strategy. In this adapted version, instead of numerical values, children match cards based on emotions. This maintains the original game's turn-taking and decision-making dynamics while shifting the focus toward emotional recognition and expression.

Skill focus

Primary Skill Focus

- Empathy

Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus

- Emotional awareness regulation and communication
- Valuing people and nature
- Problem-solving

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	2-6 children	20-30 minutes

How to play - brief game rules

Setup:

1. Prepare a deck of Emotion Cards (at least 32 cards), ensuring that each emotion appears multiple times (e.g., 4 cards for Joy, 4 for Sadness, 4 for Fear, etc.), so that several players can hold or play the same emotion.
2. Emotions can be represented either with written labels or simple drawings/icons, depending on the age group.
3. Prepare a deck of Situation Cards (at least 20 cards), each describing a short, age-appropriate scenario (e.g., "A child lost their favourite toy," "Someone feels nervous before a big test," "A friend was left out of a game").
4. Shuffle both decks and place four Situation Cards face-up on the table.
5. Each player receives three Emotion Cards in their hand.
6. The remaining Emotion Cards form the draw pile for the game

Gameplay:

7. Players take turns choosing one of their Emotion Cards and trying to match it with a Situation Card on the table.
8. To claim the match, the player must explain why the emotion fits the situation (e.g., "I match 'Fear' with 'A child lost in a supermarket' because when we get lost, we often feel scared.").
9. The player then suggests a way to help the person feeling that emotion (e.g., "To help them, I could tell them to find a security guard or stay calm and ask for help.").

10. If the reasoning is valid and convincing, the player collects the matched cards and places them in their personal pile.
11. A new Situation Card is drawn from the deck to replace the one taken.
12. The next player repeats the process.

Winning the Game:

13. The game ends when there are no more Situation Cards left.
14. Players count their matched pairs, but the focus is on who provided the most meaningful and insightful responses, not just who collected the most cards.

Special Rules:

15. If a player cannot match any of their cards, they may trade one card from their hand with the draw pile.
16. Empathy Bonus: Any player at the table (not only the one whose turn it is) may challenge a match if they believe a different emotion would fit the situation better. The challenging player must propose an alternative Emotion Card and briefly explain their reasoning.
17. If the group agrees that the alternative emotion is a better match, the challenging player wins the pair instead of the original player.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Indoor: Set up tables or mats on the floor where small groups of 3–6 players can comfortably sit around the cards. Ensure the room is quiet enough to allow for thoughtful discussion and explanations during gameplay. Visual aids for emotions can be displayed on a board to support younger learners.

How does this game develop the primary skill?

This game helps children develop empathy by encouraging them to make meaningful emotional connections between everyday situations and specific feelings. To create a valid match, players must not only identify the emotion that fits the scenario but also explain their reasoning and suggest a caring response. This process requires children to step into another person's shoes, think about what that person might be feeling, and consider how best to respond.

Because the game includes both emotional reasoning and collaborative discussion, it fosters a supportive environment where children listen to each other's perspectives, challenge respectfully, and reflect on multiple interpretations. The act of justifying their choices and responding to emotional needs helps children practice perspective-taking, emotional literacy, and prosocial behaviour in a structured yet playful way.

The game encourages perspective-taking and emotional recognition, helping children see situations through the eyes of others. It also teaches active listening and communication skills, since players must justify their choices and respond thoughtfully to different emotions. The cooperative elements of the game help develop social sensitivity and emotional intelligence.

What do we want to achieve regarding primary skill development (student understanding and/or behaviour)?

After playing this game, students will be able to:

- Make a direct connection between a situation and an appropriate emotion.
- Explain which emotions a given situation might cause in another child and why.
- Understand that the same situation can create similar emotions in others as in themselves.
- Speak openly about emotions during group discussion and justify their choices using emotional vocabulary.

Suggested use, and practical examples

A player draws "Loneliness" and matches it with "A new student at school", explaining: "When you're in a new place and don't know anyone, it's easy to feel lonely." They suggest, "I would invite them to play with me at recess."

Another player picks "Pride" and matches it with "Someone who learned how to swim", saying, "When we achieve something difficult, we feel proud of ourselves."

A more advanced round involves "Jealousy", matched with "A friend who got a better grade on a test". The child reflects, "It's normal to feel jealous, but instead of getting upset, we can ask them for tips to improve next time."

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- At least 32 cards emotion cards (with different emotions like Happiness, Sadness, Fear, etc.), ensuring that each emotion appears multiple times (e.g., 4 cards for Joy, 4 for Sadness, 4 for Fear, etc.),
- Situation Cards (at least 20 cards), each describing a short, age-appropriate scenario
- A draw pile for new cards

Guiding questions

- Can you imagine how this person is feeling right now? What might be going on inside them?
- Have you ever felt this way in a similar situation? What happened?
- What could you say or do to help someone who feels this way?
- Do you think different people might feel differently in this situation? Why?
- Why did you choose this emotion for this situation? What makes you think it fits?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children may struggle to understand why an emotion fits a situation.
Tip: The teacher can provide guiding questions, such as "Have you ever felt this way?"
- **Challenge:** Players might disagree on an emotion (e.g., one says "anger," while another says "frustration").
Tip: The teacher can facilitate discussion, showing how different people interpret emotions differently.

- **Challenge:** Some children may have difficulty offering solutions.
Tip: The teacher can introduce examples or ask, "How would you like someone to help you if you felt this way?"
- **Challenge:** If a child is shy or unsure
Tip: The teacher can let them team up with a partner to build confidence.

Difficulty level tailoring

Beginners (6-7 years old): Simplifying the game can make it more engaging and accessible. Instead of using written emotions and situations, they can rely on picture-based cards, where they match illustrated facial expressions with simple scenarios. If they struggle to verbalize an emotion, they can act it out instead, allowing them to experience feelings through movement and imitation rather than through complex explanations. This version keeps the game fun while still fostering emotional recognition.

Advanced learners (8-9 years old): The game can introduce more nuanced emotions beyond basic ones like happiness or sadness. Emotions such as embarrassment, gratitude, or frustration can be added, encouraging children to think more deeply about social interactions and different emotional responses. At this stage, discussions can go beyond just recognizing emotions, prompting players to reflect on how people regulate or manage them in different situations.

Experts (9-10 years old): The game can become even more analytical and thought-provoking. Players can be asked to not only match an emotion with a situation but also to offer two different perspectives—one from the person experiencing the emotion and another from an observer or a helper. This allows them to consider multiple viewpoints and engage in perspective-taking at a deeper level. They can also discuss real-life experiences that relate to the emotion they matched, strengthening their ability to connect personal experiences with broader emotional understanding.

Debriefing and reflection questions

- Was there an emotion that was harder to understand?
- Did you learn a new way to help someone today by knowing better how they feel?
- Why is it important to consider how others feel?
- Did any of your opinions about emotions change during the game?
- How can we use what we learned to be better friends?