

3.1.3 The emotional wolf

Brief description, and rules of the game

Inspired by the traditional Italian game Lupo Mangia Frutta (literally "Wolf Eats Fruit"), this emotional variation helps children recognise, express, and regulate emotions while engaging in a fun and active game of tag. Instead of naming fruits, children take on different emotions, which they must express and defend before being caught by the "wolf."

Skill focus

- **Primary Skill Focus**
 - Emotional awareness, regulation and communication
- **Complementary/Secondary Skill Focus**
 - Empathy
 - Connectedness
 - Critical thinking
 - Decision making

Age group	Student number	Duration
6-10 years old	6 to 20 children (team of 4-6)	15-25 minutes

How to play - brief game rules

1. Choose one player to be the "Wolf" and have them stand in the centre of the playing area (gym, courtyard, or open field).
2. All other children line up on one side of the play area, opposite the Wolf.
3. Each child silently selects an emotion from a predefined list (e.g., happiness, sadness, anger, fear, excitement, frustration) and keeps it secret.
4. The Wolf loudly calls out: "Wolf eats..." followed by one of the emotions (e.g., "Wolf eats... fear!").
5. All children who had chosen that emotion must run to the opposite side, trying not to get tagged by the Wolf.
6. Any child who is tagged must stop and express the emotion in one of three ways:
 - Describe a time they felt that emotion.
 - Mime or act out the emotion using body language.
 - Show the emotion clearly on their face.
7. If the emotion is expressed clearly and convincingly, the child can return to the main group.
8. If not, they become a "baby wolf" and help the main Wolf in the next round to catch others.
9. The game continues until all children have had a turn and most have experienced being both players and wolves.

Indoor/Outdoor Classroom layout notes

Outdoor: Ideally suited for a wide, open space such as a playground, sports field, or courtyard where children can run safely. Mark clear boundaries to define the playing field. Emotion cards (if used) can be placed near a wall or fence where children can consult them before the round starts.

Indoor: Can be adapted to a gymnasium or large multi-purpose room. Use cones or tape to mark the start and finish lines. Reduce the running distance to avoid collisions and ensure adequate adult supervision. If space is limited, consider replacing the run with a "walk to the other side" mechanic to preserve safety and flow.

How does this game develop the primary skill?

This game helps children become more aware of their emotions, learning to identify, express, and regulate them in an engaging and interactive way. By requiring children to explain or act out their emotions when caught, the game reinforces emotional literacy and helps them recognize emotions in themselves and others. It also supports the development of empathy by encouraging children to put themselves in the emotional shoes of others. By choosing an emotion and reacting to it during the game, children are prompted to reflect on what that emotion feels like in real life. When tagged, they must express the emotion clearly – through stories, facial expressions, or body language – helping both themselves and others recognize and understand that emotion more deeply.

The addition of “baby wolves” allows children to observe and support their peers in identifying emotions during subsequent rounds. This shared focus on recognizing and responding to emotions builds emotional sensitivity and awareness of others’ inner experiences in an engaging, movement-based way.

The game encourages quick thinking, decision-making, and cooperation, as children must choose whether to run, act, or communicate their emotions effectively.

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

As a result of this activity, students will:

- Able to identify emotions in themselves and others through physical cues, actions, and verbal expressions.
- Able to express their emotions clearly by using movement, gestures, or short explanations when prompted.
- Able to regulate their emotional responses when caught or when facing small moments of pressure during the game.
- Aware that emotions can be interpreted and expressed in different ways depending on the situation and the individual.
- Aware of their peers’ emotional experiences by observing how classmates choose to act out or communicate different feelings.
- Able to make quick decisions about how to act, move, or communicate while staying engaged with the group dynamics.

Suggested use, and practical examples

In one round, the Wolf calls out "Wolf eats...anger!". Some children immediately tense up their bodies, clench their fists, or pretend to stomp their feet before running. If one is caught, they might say, "I felt angry when my little brother broke my toy." This leads to a group discussion about healthy ways to express anger.

Another round features "Wolf eats...happiness!" and children laugh, jump, or wave their arms excitedly before running. A caught player might say, "I feel happy when I play outside with my friends." This helps reinforce the connection between emotions and real experiences.

A more advanced round might involve "Wolf eats...fear!", where some children may hesitate, unsure of how to express it. The teacher can help by asking, "Can anyone share a time they felt scared? What did your body do?" This discussion helps children understand that fear can be expressed in many ways, from freezing in place to hiding.

Materials and tools needed for implementation

- A spacious play area for children to run freely
- Emotion cards (optional, to help children choose their emotion)
- A whistle or bell (optional, to regulate turns)

Guiding questions

- Why do you think someone might feel that emotion?
- Can you show me how your body feels when you have that emotion?
- What would help you feel better if you felt that way?
- Have you ever seen someone else feel this emotion? What did you do?
- If you were the Wolf, how would you guess someone is feeling just by looking?

Tips and Tricks for dealing with challenges

- **Challenge:** Some children might struggle to quickly express an emotion, especially those they are less familiar with (such as embarrassment or frustration).
Tip: The teacher can encourage them by offering simple prompts, such as "Think about a time when you felt that way," or "How would your body look if you were really excited?"
- **Challenge:** There may also be instances where children exaggerate their expressions, making emotions appear unrealistic or overly dramatic.
Tip: In these cases, the teacher can facilitate a short discussion about how real emotions are often more subtle and can vary between individuals.
- **Challenge:** Some players may have difficulty thinking of real-life examples when trying to "rescue" frozen peers.
Tip: The teacher can model examples, such as "People feel disappointment when they lose a game" or "Pride happens when we do something difficult successfully." This helps expand children's emotional vocabulary and recognition skills.
- **Challenge:** Lastly, younger or more sensitive children might get frustrated if tagged frequently. To ensure inclusion and engagement,
Tip: The teacher can modify the rule so that frozen players are released automatically after a short time, regardless of peer intervention.

Difficulty level tailoring

Beginners (6-7 years old): It can be helpful to use visual emotion cards to help them choose their emotion more easily. Instead of explaining emotions verbally, they can be encouraged to act them out using body language.

Advanced learners (8-9 years old): The game can include more subtle emotions, such as embarrassment, pride, or relief. After each round, the teacher can ask, "Can anyone share a real-life example of when they felt this emotion?" to encourage deeper reflection.

Experts (9-10 years old): The game can be made more challenging by adding a new rule: players must justify why they chose their emotion before running. For example, if the Wolf says, "Wolf eats ...sadness", a player might say, "I felt sad when I lost my favourite toy" before they can run. This encourages emotional awareness and storytelling.

Debriefing and reflection questions

- Was it easy or difficult to choose and express an emotion? Why?
- How did it feel to show your emotion in front of others?
- Which emotions did you recognize in others, and how did you know what they were feeling?
- Did anyone surprise you with how they expressed an emotion?
- How can this game help us understand our friends better when they feel something strong?