**Feelings Apples to Apples®**

Source: Nicole Schwarz, MA, LMFT

**Recommended Age Range:** Eight and Up  
**Treatment Modality:** Individual, Group, Family

**Goals**
- Expand feeling vocabulary  
- Improve identification and communication of emotions  
- Increase awareness that people may feel different emotions in the same situation  
- Build empathy and ability to see things from another person’s perspective

**Materials**
- Emotions and Scenario Cards (available from [www.Do2Learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com))  
- Pen  
- Paper  
- Small treats or stickers

**Advance Preparation**
Download the “Emotions and Scenario Cards” from [Do2Learn.com](http://www.do2learn.com). There are three different “levels” according to age and expressive language skills. Choose the level that best fits the age and expressive language skills of your client, group or family.

Print and cut into cards.

Optional step: Print the cards on colored paper (one color for Emotion Cards and a different color for the Scenario Cards). Laminate.

**Description**
The inspiration for this game came from the game Apples to Apples® in which one card is placed in the center of the table and each player must choose a card from their hand that relates to the card in the center.

Deal each person five Emotion Cards (this can vary with group size). Players may look at their cards. Place any remaining cards face down in a pile in the middle of the table.

Ask if anyone has any questions about the emotion words they are holding. Answer any questions, clarifying the emotion and giving an example.

Place the pile of Scenario Cards face down in the center of the table.
Flip over one Scenario Card. The card may read something like “I don’t want to get out of bed or do anything at all. I feel…”

Each person looks at the Emotion Cards in his or her hand and chooses an emotion that may fit with that scenario. Once chosen, each person puts the chosen emotion card face up on the table. If a player does not want to pick an emotion or does not have one that applies, he or she may “pass” until the next round. The practitioner then encourages each person to talk about why they chose that emotion, encouraging them to create a “back story,” if necessary.

After the cards have been discussed, the practitioner may ask if anyone has been in this scenario or a situation similar to the one on the Scenario Card. If the players feel comfortable, encourage them to share how they felt or pick an emotion to describe how they felt.

If using rewards, players can earn a small treat or a point each time they share a feeling they personally experienced related to the situation on the card.

Discard the used Emotion Cards and Scenario Card. Each person chooses a new emotion card from the pile (if there are cards still available). Flip over another Scenario Card and continue with the game.

Continue until all Emotion Cards are used or the game comes to a natural end.

**Process questions may include:**
- Which emotion words were new to you?
- Which of the scenarios are most like you or your family?
- Which emotions are most often expressed in your home?
- Do you think people ever make assumptions about how someone is feeling?
  - Give an example of a time someone made an assumption about how you were feeling.
  - Give an example of a time you made an assumption about how someone else was feeling.
- How could an awareness of other’s emotions benefit you/your family?
- How could you use this awareness in your communication with others?

**Discussion**
Many children are familiar with the emotions happy, sad and mad. This game challenges clients to learn new emotion words and put them into context.

At times, it may be difficult for players to choose an emotion that fits the scenario. The players may have to stretch their imagination and creativity to explain why they chose a particular card. The players may also have to look at the scenario from a different perspective. For example, “not wanting to get out of bed” may fit with “depressed,” “worried” or “calm” depending on the interpretation of the scenario. This highlights the message that not all people experience the same
emotions, even if they are in the same situation. It also provides an opportunity for individuals to build empathy as they hear the varied emotional responses.

**Alternatives:**
Each person holds five Scenario Cards, and the Emotion Cards are in a pile on the table. Flip over an emotion, and each person finds a situation that may fit with that emotion.

For younger players, parents and children can be on teams, or they can play together against the practitioner.

The practitioner may want to “stack the deck” prior to the session, choosing scenarios that fit best with the client’s story or treatment goals.

**About The Author**
Nicole Schwarz, MA, LMFT is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist in St. Paul, MN ([www.NicoleSchwarzCounseling.com](http://www.NicoleSchwarzCounseling.com)). Her practice focuses on helping children manage symptoms of anxiety, anger, ADHD and depression. She also works to decrease stress and conflict, improve communication and strengthen relationships within families. Prior to starting her own business, Nicole worked as an in-home therapist to at-risk children and families. Nicole also provides positive parent support and encouragement on her blog: [www.imperfectfamilies.com](http://www.imperfectfamilies.com).

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