

Tic-Tac-Toe for Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Communication

This lesson uses **tic-tac-toe** as a **fun, interactive way** to help students **relieve anxiety, build communication skills, and practice social-emotional awareness**. It includes variations that add creativity and deeper reflection on emotions.

Lesson Details

- **Grade Level:** 1st-3rd
 - **Duration:** 30-45 minutes
 - **Focus:** Stress relief, communication, emotional awareness
 - **Subjects:** Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), Art, Cooperative Play
 - **Materials:** Chalk markers, ChalkWild backpacks, printable tic-tac-toe grids (optional)
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Learning Objectives

- Students will play tic-tac-toe to practice **turn-taking and teamwork**.
 - Students will use art and words to **express emotions** while playing.
 - Students will reflect on how playing games can help **relieve stress and build friendships**.
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Success Criteria

- ✓ I can take turns and play fairly.
 - ✓ I can communicate with my partner in a respectful way.
 - ✓ I can reflect on how playing games helps me feel calm and connected.
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Lesson Components

Beginning (10-15 min) – Discussion & Warm-Up

- **Class Discussion:** Ask students:
 - “How do you feel when you play games with friends?”
 - “What are ways we can show kindness and sportsmanship when we play?”
- **Mini Breathing Exercise:** Before playing, lead a short **deep-breathing exercise** to promote relaxation.


 **Modification:** Show a simple **video or chart** about feelings and teamwork.

2 Middle (15-20 min) – Tic-Tac-Toe Variations & Playtime

- Students **pair up and play tic-tac-toe** on their ChalkWild backpack or on a printed grid.
- Play at least **3 rounds**, switching partners after each game.
- Introduce a **creative variation**:


Tic-Tac-Toe Variations for SEL

- 1 **Emotion Tic-Tac-Toe** – Instead of X's and O's, students use **emoji faces** or **feeling words** (e.g., happy vs. calm). After the game, they **share when they last felt those emotions**.
- 2 **Kindness Tic-Tac-Toe** – Players write **kind words** (e.g., “brave,” “helpful,” “caring”) in the squares. After the game, they **compliment their partner using one of the words**.
- 3 **Art Tic-Tac-Toe** – Instead of symbols, students **draw simple pictures** in each square (e.g., a star, heart, smiley face). This helps **reduce pressure** for students who feel anxious about winning or losing.

 **Modification:** For a more **active version**, use a **chalk-drawn tic-tac-toe grid** on the playground where students **jump** into squares to place their mark!

3 End (10-15 min) – Reflection & Sharing

- **Pair-Share:** Students answer:
 - “How did playing tic-tac-toe make you feel?”
 - “Did you enjoy playing with different partners? Why?”
- **Class Reflection:** Ask,
 - “How can playing games help us feel calm and happy?”
 - “What is one way you showed kindness while playing?”
- **Erase and Reset:** Students erase their backpacks and take **one deep breath** before moving on.

 **Alternative:** Take a class photo before erasing and **create a class “Game Time” bulletin board!**

Supports for Diverse Learners

- ✓ **Provide visual emotion cards** for students who need help expressing feelings.
- ✓ **Use verbal cues** instead of writing for younger students.
- ✓ **Allow play in small groups** instead of pairs to support social learners.