

YouCue Feelings:

Using Online Videos for Social Learning

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Chapter 1

Introducing YouCue Feelings

There's nothing like an engaging story. Whether it's a familiar book, a stirring movie, or an amusing tale we ask a beloved grandparent to retell time and time again, stories can both entertain and instruct. In spoken words, pictures, gestures, animation, or film, stories show us the human experience. YouCue Feelings uses a relatively new form of storytelling—YouTube videos—as material for learning about relationships.

The Program

YouCue Feelings (YCF) is a program for elementary and middle school age students who struggle with social understanding (often as an outcome of Autism Spectrum, ADD/ADHD, or other diagnoses). Created for therapists, teachers, and parents for use in individual, small group, classroom, and home environments, YCF contains links to preselected YouTube videos as well as activities (called YouCues) specifically created to build children's social knowledge. For younger students, YCF incorporates storybooks (either ones you already have or choose from a suggested list) to reinforce learning. Typically-developing students can also benefit; YCF provides opportunities for them to practice what they already know.

The videos and activities in YCF have been carefully chosen to engage students, jump start learning, and focus discussions about a range of fundamental social learning concepts. Watching creatively rendered stories followed by easy activities makes YCF an appealing and effective tool. Students may not even realize that they're building crucial skills. YouCue activities range from simple drawing projects or

discussions about the characters in a YouTube video, to more sophisticated activities such as building connections between the social learning concepts in videos and what happens in a student's everyday life.

Our goal for students with social learning challenges is for them to acquire social relationship skills that will improve their capacity for effective, fulfilling relationships with family members, people at their school or work, and members of their broader community. This is a large and complicated task. YouCue Feelings simplifies such learning (Graphic 1).



Graphic 1. The components of YouCue Feelings

This book contains everything you need to start using YouTube videos as social learning material. *The focus of this book is **feelings** because emotions are fundamental to relationships and social interactions.* It will help students develop their ability to label feelings and track feelings changing over time (Illustration 1), as well as talk about their own emotional experiences. Countless YouTube videos portray feelings, and this book introduces you to 25 great choices.

Become familiar with the videos, review the activities, and gather the suggested materials (see Chapter 2). Then you'll be ready to fire up your Internet connection and start YouCue Feelings!

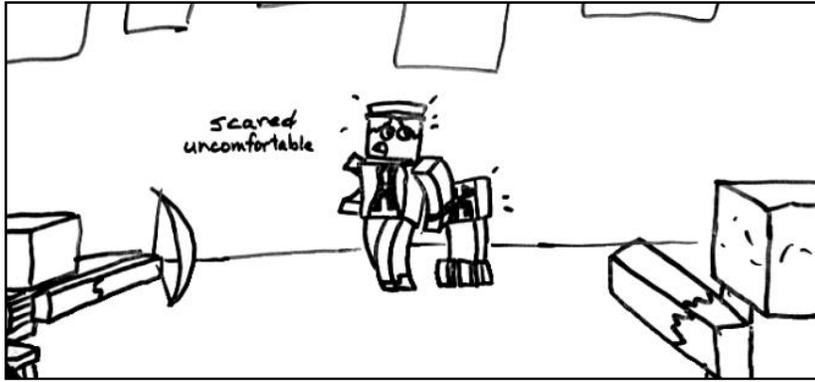


Illustration 1. Student illustration of an uncomfortable feeling in a Minecraft YouTube video.



Illustration 2. Student illustration of a comfortable feeling in a Minecraft YouTube video.

YouCue Feelings is the first of a series. Upcoming YouCue materials will:

- Present new sets of preselected YouTube videos and YouCue activities to cover:
 - a. Internal processes: flexibility, perseverance, and perspective taking
 - b. Relationship processes: cooperation, helping, jerky behavior, bumps in relationships, repairs, and “re-dos”

- Update the YouCue feelings list of recommended YouTube videos
- Expand the already released sets of YouCue activities
- Supply templates for writing social learning goals and measuring progress

Register your purchase at www.socialtime.org to receive free updates. Also, check the website to learn about additional materials.

The Importance of Social Learning

Social interaction surrounds us as we move through our lives. Even when we aren't actively engaged in interaction, we're still exposed to it—we can see and hear it. Social exposure provides us with critical information that guides our social learning. From our observations and experiences we learn what does and doesn't work. We learn how to repair our social errors. We apply what we've picked up over time as we continue to learn what is and isn't effective.

Of course, not all of us have the same degree of interest in or ability to process the social information that surrounds us (Lipton & Nowicki, 2009; Baron-Cohen, 1995). Some of us, from a very early age, are facile at interpreting the feeling states of others, engaging easily with those around us. Others struggle to interpret the confusing code of social engagement. Individual “wiring,” among other factors, results in varying levels of social ability.

In the past decade, many materials have been developed for students who struggle to understand, develop, and maintain social relationships. The YCF program is meant to be one tool in your social teaching toolbox. *This program assumes a working knowledge of the communicative and interpersonal issues of students with challenges in social cognition.* If you're just getting started in this area, a great place to find a lot of relevant information is Michelle Garcia Winner's Social Thinking® website: www.socialthinking.com.

Feelings First

You may be wondering why YouCue begins with feelings. After all, there are many social “behaviors” we want our students using—or not using! There's so much for them to learn about the dance of social

interaction. Well, feelings form a base for all of that (Tomkins, 2008; Ekman, 2007).

At the heart of relationships is the ability to discern how others are feeling as well as what they're thinking and planning. To identify the feelings of others, we need an emotional vocabulary beyond "happy," "sad," and "mad." More sophisticated emotional vocabulary is everywhere, from books to TV shows to talk around the Thanksgiving table. This vocabulary often describes gradations of feelings. For example, "annoyed" is a smaller-sized feeling, and "furious" is a larger-sized feeling in the feeling family "angry." We need to understand gradations of feelings so that our interactions match the situation. *Do your students resist talking about "feeling words"? Show them a cool YouTube and see how many they come up with* (Illustration 3).

<u>comfortable</u>	<u>uncomfortable</u>
happy	annoyed
OK	mad
excited	furious
silly	grouchy
pleased	upset
successful	frustrated
surprised	explosive
	sad
	upset

Illustration 3. Feelings list developed by a class of fourth graders after watching a YouTube video. Nice!

To be socially successful, we need to interact differently with someone who is annoyed than with someone who is furious. The child who has difficulty noticing these gradations, or perhaps even labeling basic emotions, may not recognize a peer is angry until that person is *very* angry. Oops, too late!

Students with social-cognitive challenges may also find it hard to identify and differentiate the size of their own feelings. This skill is important because the more we know about feelings, the better we are at dealing with uncomfortable emotions (Barret, et al., 2001; Bloom, 1998), and the better our social interactions are in general.

If we can catch ourselves before we get too upset, we have a greater chance of making a change that helps us feel better. If we wait too long, we may be overwhelmed by uncomfortable feelings, making it more challenging to figure out and implement solutions. Many students with social learning challenges experience a lot of *big* feelings.

They become very angry or very sad. Because they're unaware of or misinterpret more subtle feelings, their emotional development is limited.

Feelings are always in transition, rarely remaining in one state for long. Understanding and tolerating these shifts, as well as developing tools for managing them, is fundamental to our social success. YouCue Feelings encourages students to learn about feelings with motivating and enjoyable materials.

The Crucial Role of Context

Of course, feelings don't happen in a vacuum. Feelings and context are complementary; neither occurs without the other. Feelings arise as we interact with the world, within dynamic contexts that are constantly shifting and never exactly the same. *Students with social learning difficulties struggle to figure out and keep up with what contextual cues are socially relevant* (Vermeulen, 2012).

To fit with those around us (and figure out what others are thinking), we must constantly scan and process contextual information to determine what's happening as well as what we need to be doing and not doing. Being socially observant of context involves determining not just what others are thinking about but their intentions as well as feelings. As people act to achieve their intended goal through execution of a plan, they affect those around them, their feelings as well as actions. It gets very complicated, yet this web of contextual processing is what leads us to understand what's expected of us and how we can achieve what we want.

The better we are at figuring out what others are thinking, planning, and feeling, the more successful we'll probably be in our attempts at interaction. People communicate much of this information using channels that can be tricky for our students to figure out: fleeting eye gaze, facial expression, nonverbal movement, and tone of voice.

Constantly monitoring contextual changes to make sure we're doing what's expected and acceptable is critical. Our most successful social interactions take place when our contextual processing skills and emotional awareness allow us to take care of our own as well as the other person's feelings.

In my previous book, *Movie Time Social Learning* (2012), I presented a structured format for building these skills using popular movies. Though YCF activities don't focus on these fundamental skills (e.g.,

contextual processing to determine socially relevant information) directly, please remember their importance, and discuss thoughts and plans of characters in context. *Sticky notes presenting thoughts and plans on a paused frame placed above characters' heads can reinforce what students are figuring out.*

YouTube as Social Learning Material

Current research suggests that students on the Autism Spectrum struggle with the processing of social motion—how our movements provide information about our intent (Kroeger, et al., 2013; Kaiser & Pelphrey, 2012; Klin et al., 2009). For example, let's say I'm building a PlayDoh snowman and someone takes its head off and smushes it. I gather my materials and move to another table looking upset. My intent could be interpreted (based on contextual cues and social knowledge) as “she's upset and is going to build it again away from the person who smushed it.” However, a student with social challenges would probably give a more limited interpretation based solely on concrete action: “She's moving her stuff to another table.” If you don't realize the important pieces of information of *smushed snowman* (concrete fact) and *upset because I liked it the way I was building it* (intuiting how my feeling relates to my plan and how my plan was derailed by the actions of someone), you're less likely to spontaneously express empathy or tell the smusher to stop messing with other people's PlayDoh. Or, if you're the smusher, you may not realize that anything is wrong at all or snap at those who try to point out your error.

Students with social learning challenges have a harder time scanning context for relevant social details, following plans of people, and incorporating nonverbal information into their social understanding. One crucial element in improving such skills is exposure and guided teaching (Ukrainetz, 1998). YCF provides the opportunity for contextualized guided teaching with online videos and storybooks.

Life as we experience it can't be replayed. But media (movies, movie shorts, and YouTube videos) can be paused, rewound, and studied as interactions and events unfold (Suskind, 2014). Watching media in structured ways allows students to practice social attention. We all find it challenging to look at our own behavior. When building social understanding, it's “much easier, as well as far more enjoyable, to identify and label the mistakes of others than to recognize our own” (Kahneman, 2011). Talking about the uncomfortable feelings,

mistakes, and successes of others can make it easier for us to admit that we face similar situations, recognizing that we all sometimes stumble, sometimes feel uncomfortable, and sometimes succeed.

YCF uses the appealing story lines of short, easily accessed videos as engaging and relationship-rich teaching material. YouTube videos selected for YCF have great story lines, full of emotions and interpersonal engagement. Most students are more than happy to watch a YouTube video and then talk about their observations. *When chosen carefully, there's something for everyone on YouTube.* YouCue Feelings makes it easy to guide students in thinking about, talking about, and ultimately, practicing important social learning ideas in their everyday lives.

Coming Up

Upcoming chapters will give you all the information you need to use YouCue Feelings.

- **Chapter 2:** Getting Ready...This chapter acquaints you with the program.
- **Chapter 3:** YouTube Video Summaries & Links...Find information about the preselected online videos here.
- **Chapter 4:** YouCue Activities...This chapter contains 50 activities to build emotional understanding.
- **Chapter 5:** Moving Ahead...Find information about expanding YCF with your own ideas.
- **Appendix...** Appendices are important! Here you'll find video and YouCue pairing guides, suggested books, materials, and lists to support emotional learning, and additional information.

Ready to keep going? Your next stop is Chapter 2.

