Simon Says

Simple, easy, and a favorite with very young kids. With the right instructions, you can use this timeless game to teach kids Theory of Mind, as well as how to express their emotions.

If you've never played Simon Says with children before, explain the rules. Basically, explain that they'll need to pay close attention to what you're saying. That is, to follow instructions only when you start by saying: "*Simon Says*!" Give them a heads up that you'll be testing their listening skills, so they have to stay sharp listeners throughout.

The game can have several rounds, but you'll only be giving the kids visual cues (facial expressions, gestures, and so forth) to match your instructions in Round One. For each round, they'll match your actions…but remember—only when "Simon Says"!

Round One: *Start by telling the children what emotions to express, while modeling the behavior yourself*. For example:
Simon Says: Do a sad face (pout, stick out your bottom lip);
Simon Says: Stand up tall and be confident; or
Simon Says: Touch your nose (here you can 'trick' them and do something else instead).

Round Two: Continue giving verbal instructions for children to carry out. *In this round, however, you'll only provide visual cues for every other instruction*. Good examples include:
Simon Says: Your brain is confused (Scratch your head & roll your eyes in confusion);
Simon Says: Your feelings are hurt; and
Simon Says: You're alert and wide awake! (A 'trick' one: Look tired, sleepy, and yawn)

Rounds Three, Four, and Five: Here you continue the verbal instructions, asking the kids to express different emotions such as surprise, worry, and amusement—whatever seems most appropriate. Only join in on the last 'trick' one, where you give one instruction, but do something else instead.

Each of the instructions that you give the kids should encourage them to express different feelings, thoughts, or intentions. By recognizing and expressing these emotional states, they can learn to develop awareness and empathy, important parts of the Theory of Mind.