

Understanding Social Cues with S.T.A.R.

Lesson Objective:

Students will learn to interpret social cues accurately, reflect on how their assumptions influence reactions, and use the S.T.A.R. strategy to manage social situations.

Materials Needed:



- Copy of Chapter 13: Understanding Social Cues with S.T.A.R.
- Paper and pencils
- S.T.A.R. Strategy Poster
- Scenario Cards for Role Play
- Home Connection Letter

Introduction to the Topic (10 minutes)

Greeting Outline:

- Welcome the children and have them sit in a circle (if applicable)
- Briefly discuss the concept of social cues

Greeting and Circle Time Teacher Script

1. Warm Welcome and Opening Discussion:

- “Good morning, everyone! Today, we are diving into a topic that can help us in both school and life: understanding social cues. Has anyone ever felt confused by something someone said, or wondered if they were joking or serious? It can be tricky to figure out, right? Social cues include things like tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. Sometimes, our brains make quick guesses about what’s going on, but we don’t always get it right. Today, we’ll practice recognizing these cues and see how the S.T.A.R. strategy can help us handle them better.”

2. Discussion Starter

- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you’re not sure if someone is joking or serious? What happened, and how did you handle it?
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you “misread” the “vibe” of the group? What happened? How did you handle the situation?

Read the Chapter (15 minutes)

Story Time Outline:



- Read Chapter 13 aloud.
- Ask questions during key parts of the story.

Story Time Teacher Script:

1. Prepare the Children for the Story:

- "Let's read Chapter 13: Understanding Social Cues with S.T.A.R." together. In this chapter, Ollie and his friends learn about the importance of understanding social cues and asking for clarification if they aren't sure."
- (Read the chapter aloud, pausing at key moments to ask questions and engage the children.)

2. Read the Chapter with Emphasis on Key Moments.

While reading, pause during key moments.

Ask Questions:

- What confused Buzz about Harriet's story?
- How does sarcasm make it harder to understand what someone really means?
- Why did Sammy feel unsure about Luke's comment in gym class?
- What do you think Luke was really feeling when he made the comment to Sammy?
- How did the group use the S.T.A.R. strategy to reflect on Sammy's experience?
- Why is it important to ask questions when we don't understand someone's words or actions?
- What did Sammy learn by asking Luke for clarity?
- How did Maya's experience with Harriet show the challenges of interpreting tone?
- Why do our brains sometimes make incorrect predictions about social situations?
- How can being aware of our assumptions help us in conversations?

Chapter 13: Understanding Social Cues with S.T.A.R.

The first week back at school after winter break had arrived, and the friends were excited to catch up and share stories about their time off. As they settled back into their routines, Mr. Jenkins introduced a new topic in social-emotional learning: interpreting social cues.

“Not everything people say is always straightforward,” he explained. “Sometimes, people use sarcasm, jokes, or indirect language. It’s important to remember that we can’t always ‘read’ someone’s intentions accurately. Our brains make guesses based on past experiences, but those guesses can sometimes be wrong.”

Ollie and his friends listened carefully. They had all experienced moments when they didn’t quite understand someone’s tone or body language. As Mr. Jenkins spoke, they began to realize how easy it was to misinterpret social cues.

The Lunchroom Confusion

Later that day, the group gathered in the lunchroom. As they chatted, Harriet told a story about a prank she had played on her brother during winter break. She grinned and said, “He thought it was hilarious... or at least he acted like it.”

Buzz, who wasn’t sure if Harriet was being serious or sarcastic, chuckled nervously. “So, did he actually like it?” he asked, unsure of how to respond.

Harriet shrugged. “Well, he did laugh, but sometimes he laughs even when he’s annoyed. So I’m not really sure.”

Bennie, who had been listening, said, “It sounds like he might have been pretending to think it was funny so he wouldn’t hurt your feelings.”

This made Ollie think. “It’s kind of tricky to figure out when someone is being sarcastic or when they’re saying what they actually mean,” he said. “Our brains are always guessing based on what we’ve seen before, but we can still get it wrong.”

Misunderstanding Sarcasm

The next day, during gym class, Sammy found himself in a confusing situation. He was playing basketball when another student, Luke, missed a shot and said, “Oh, great job, Sammy.

Thanks for the help!” Sammy hadn’t been anywhere near Luke when he took the shot, so he wasn’t sure what Luke meant.

Sammy thought Luke might be angry and blaming him, but he wasn’t sure. He felt a little hurt but decided to ignore the comment. However, the uneasy feeling lingered, and it affected his mood for the rest of gym class.

Afterward, Sammy shared what had happened with Ollie and Maya. “I didn’t know if Luke was being sarcastic or actually blaming me,” Sammy said. “But either way, it didn’t feel good.”

Maya thought for a moment. “Maybe Luke was frustrated about missing the shot, and he was just saying something without really thinking,” she said. “Sometimes people use sarcasm as a way to deal with their own feelings.”

Using the S.T.A.R. Strategy to Reflect

The friends decided to use the S.T.A.R. strategy to reflect on what had happened and how to handle similar situations in the future:

Stop: Ollie suggested that whenever they felt confused or hurt by something someone said, they should take a moment to pause and not react right away.

Think: Harriet encouraged them to think about the possible meanings behind the comment. “Was the person joking, frustrated, or trying to be funny? It might help to consider different possibilities,” she said.

Act: Betty suggested that if they weren’t sure how to interpret a comment, they could ask the person to clarify in a friendly way. “You could say something like, ‘Were you being serious?’ or ‘What did you mean by that?’” she said.

Reflect: Maya added that after the situation was over, they should think about what they had learned and whether they could handle things differently next time. “It’s okay to realize that we didn’t understand something correctly,” she said. “That’s how we learn.”

Asking for Clarity

The next day, Sammy saw Luke in the hallway and decided to ask him about the comment during gym class. “Hey, Luke,” Sammy said, “yesterday in basketball, you said ‘great job’ to me, but I wasn’t sure if you were joking or if you were actually upset.”

Luke looked surprised. “Oh, I was just being sarcastic,” he said. “I was frustrated with myself for missing the shot, not with you. I didn’t mean anything by it.”

Sammy felt relieved. “Okay, thanks for clearing that up,” he said. “I wasn’t sure, and it kind of threw me off.”

Learning to Interpret Social Cues

Over the next week, the friends continued to talk about their experiences with social cues and what they had learned. They realized that while their brains often made quick guesses about what someone meant, those guesses weren’t always accurate. It was important to be open to the idea that they might misinterpret a tone or body language.

Harriet shared another example. “Yesterday, I thought Maya was annoyed with me because she gave me a short answer when I asked her a question. But then I realized she was just really focused on her homework.”

Maya nodded. “I didn’t even realize my tone came off that way,” she said. “It’s a good reminder that sometimes how we say things doesn’t always match how we feel.”

Moving Forward

As the friends returned to their routines, they felt more aware of the importance of understanding social cues and asking for clarification when needed. They knew that interpreting subtle signals like sarcasm or indirect speech was a skill that took time to develop.

Ollie summed it up. “It’s like Mr. Jenkins said: Our brains make guesses about what’s going on, but we have to be careful not to assume we’re always right. It’s okay to ask if we’re not sure.” Betty added, “And if we get it wrong, it doesn’t mean we did something bad. It just means we’re still learning.”

The friends left school that day with a new goal: to pay closer attention to the social cues around them, to ask questions when they were confused, and to remember that even when they couldn’t read someone’s intentions perfectly, they could always choose to respond with kindness.

3. Post-Chapter Teacher Script

- **Teacher:** “This story shows us how Ollie and his friends were able to use the S.T.A.R. Strategy to help them deal with social situations that you might find challenging to understand!”

4. Post-Chapter Questions

These questions encourage children to think deeply about what they listen to and to understand that they can use the S.T.A.R. Strategy in many different situations.

- Have you ever experienced a misunderstanding because of sarcasm or tone? What happened?
- How do you feel when someone misunderstands your words or actions?
- What can you do if you notice someone reacting negatively to something you said?
- Why is it sometimes hard to ask for clarity in social situations?
- How can we use the S.T.A.R. strategy to manage misunderstandings?
- What body language or facial expressions help you understand someone’s emotions better?
- How can we practice kindness when we don’t fully understand someone’s intentions?
- How might cultural differences affect the way we interpret social cues?
- What are some ways to respond if someone misinterprets your words?
- How can learning about social cues help us build better friendships?

Do an Activity (20 minutes)

- Students will practice interpreting social cues and using the S.T.A.R. Strategy.



Activity: Social Cue Role-play (20 minutes)

1. Introduce Activity

- "Now that we've read about how Ollie and his friends learned about social cues and the challenges that can come with that, we're going to practice some scenarios that might help us get a bit better at that by using the S.T.A.R. strategy"

2. Instructions

- Divide students into pairs or small groups.
- Provide each group with a **scenario card** (see examples below).
- One student acts out the scenario using body language, tone, or indirect language while the other student interprets the social cues and applies the S.T.A.R. strategy.
- Groups switch roles and try a new scenario.

Closing Discussion (5 minutes):

3. Sharing

- After role-playing, discuss what students noticed about interpreting social cues and how the S.T.A.R. strategy helped them.



4. Wrapping it Up

- "Great work, everyone! Social cues can be complicated, but today we learned that by pausing and thinking, we can avoid misunderstandings. Even when our brains make quick guesses, asking for clarity can help us see what's really going on. Let's remember to respond with kindness, even when we aren't sure about someone's intentions."

Wrap Up the Lesson (5 minutes)

1. Review and Reflection Overview:

- Have students reflect on possible misunderstandings as a consequence of misreading social cues.

Review and Reflection Teacher Script



1. Gather in a Circle for Reflection:

- "Let's all come back together in a circle."
- "Reading social cues can be tricky, as we've observed. Interpreting tone of voice, body language and facial expressions isn't always easy. What can happen if you misread some of these cues?"
- "How will using the S.T.A.R. strategy help you? "
- "What did you learn from today's lesson that you'll carry forward in your social interactions?"
- Encourage students to use the S.T.A.R. Strategy when confusion occurs with social cues comes up throughout the year.

2. Closing

- "Great job today practicing interpreting social cues and realizing that these messages are not always that clear. I think if we use the S.T.A.R. Strategy when this type of confusion arises, we might find that we deal with these situations more effectively."

Home Connection Letter

1. **Sending Information Home:**

- “Before you go, I have a letter for you to take home. It explains that we learned about social cues and how to use the S.T.A.R. Strategy when challenges interpreting these cues arise.”
- Hand out the letters as the children prepare to leave.

Parent Letter

Sending Information Home:

- Provide each child with a letter to take home to their parents explaining the lesson.

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Today in class, your child learned about understanding social cues and how our brains make predictions about others' words and actions. We discussed the importance of interpreting these cues correctly and practiced using the S.T.A.R. strategy (Stop, Think, Act, Reflect) to handle social situations.

Encouraging your child to talk about their experiences with social cues can help strengthen their skills. Here are some questions you can ask your child:

- What did you learn about reading tone or body language today?
- How does the S.T.A.R. strategy help you when you feel confused in social situations?
- Can you think of a time when someone misunderstood you? What did you do?



Thank you for supporting your child in developing these important character development skills!

With Gratitude,

S.T.A.R. Strategy



Stop -Take some deep breaths.

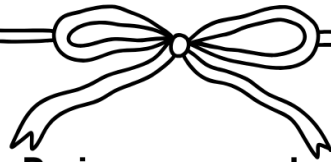
Think -What solutions are there?

Act -Pick the best solution.

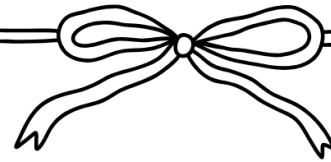
Reflect -How did it go?



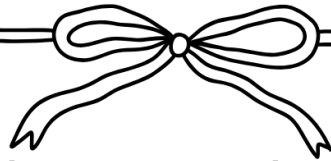
©2025 Anna-Lisa Mackey, M.Ed., All rights reserved.



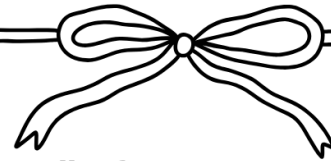
During group work, someone says, "I guess that could work," without enthusiasm. What might they be thinking?



You say, "Sorry I'm late," and your teacher responds with, "Finally!" How do you interpret their tone?



A classmate responds with, "No problem," after you accidentally bump into them, but their tone sounds annoyed. What could that mean?



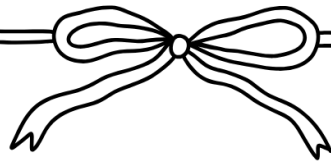
You tell a funny story, and a friend laughs louder than usual. Are they really amused or laughing to be polite?



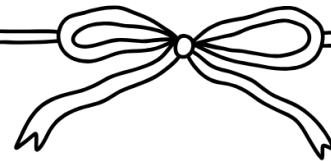
You compliment a friend's artwork, and they say, "It's not that good," while smiling. How should you interpret this?



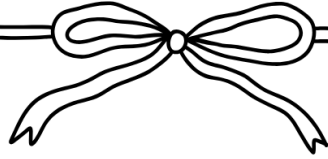
At the bus stop, a friend says, "Lucky you," after you tell them about your winter break trip. Are they envious or just excited for you?



A friend says, "Thanks for sharing," after you take the last piece of candy. Are they genuinely grateful or upset?



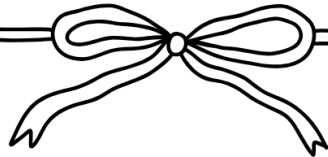
During a game, someone says, "You're so good at this," but with a flat tone. How do you interpret their comment?



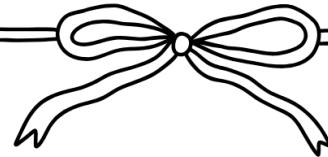
A friend says, "Nice one," after you spill a drink on the table. Are they being sarcastic or encouraging?



Your classmate gives a short, "Sure, whatever," when you ask if they want to play at recess. What might they mean?



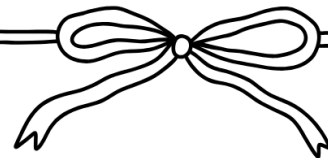
A teammate says, "Good job," with a frown after you make a great play. Are they really happy for you?



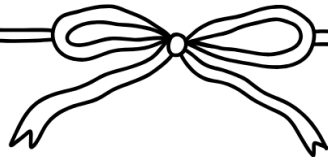
A sibling mutters, "Thanks for nothing," after you forget to share your snacks. Are they frustrated or teasing?



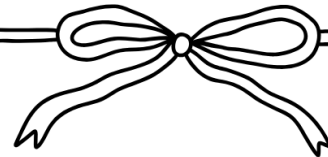
You tell a friend about your weekend plans, and they respond by rolling their eyes. What could they be feeling?



At lunch, someone says, "Oh wow, great joke," but they don't smile. Are they being sincere?



A friend shrugs and says, "Whatever," when you suggest a game to play. Are they uninterested, or just tired?



You offer to help a classmate, and they say, "Yeah, right," with a smirk. Do they appreciate your help?