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- Mind Reading: The Interactive Guide to Emotions.
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Mind Reading: The Interactive Guide to Emotions

Reviewed by [Wade Junek](#), MD FRCPC

Mind Reading: The Interactive Guide to Emotions.

Simon Baron-Cohen (Principle Author) Jessica Kingsley Publisher: London, UK. 2003. 4 CDs or 1 DVD, US \$129.00

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Simon Baron-Cohen, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the University of Cambridge has long been known for his work with autism and, as we all know, children with autism have quite remarkable deficiencies in their ability to use or read the social cues and emotions of everyday life. In this remarkable set of CDs he has taken up the challenge of teaching these skills in a unique manner.

Once installed, the child or youth (and even adults) signs on their unique identifier and enters one of three main centres: Emotions Library, Learning Center, and Games Zone. The material is graded into 6 levels of complexity, and various forms of help (e.g. a happy robot 'Emoto', somewhat like a talking MicroSoft Office Assistant) are easily available allowing even young children to explore on their own.

In the *Emotions Library*, 412 emotions are arranged in 24 groups. Once the child picks a group, she or he can click on an emotion in that group and see actors (6 different ones representing various ages, cultures and both sexes) in a brief video with a narrator describing the emotion and what to watch for. In addition, there are sample story lines illustrating the emotion (at the younger levels, clicking on a line leads to the narrator speaking it), sample voice expressions of the emotion and information about the emotion (definition, whether it is seen as positive or negative, notes about how others usually react to it). Students get a chance to make and keep notes under their log-on name.

In the *Learning Center*, the emotions groups are similar to the library but the structure is more conducive to learning and exploration, again with videos, stories and vocal expressions separately. The lessons contain test questions and give students a chance to concentrate on the beginners 100 or top 20 along with questions and rewards. The quizzes give a chance to find faces with specific emotions, match emotional statements and faces, match statements with people in a picture.

Rewards are built into much of the practice and include hundreds of objects with a variety of information or movement. Objects include flags, butterflies, trains, birds, objects of the universe and more. If all the train cars are collected, it can be assembled to drive around a track. Other objects can be enlarged under a microscope, time lapse movies can be constructed and, my favourite, band instruments play—the more instruments collected, the more interesting the music that can be constructed. One reward is building up time to spend in the *Games Zone*.

The *Games Zone* includes matching games, hand-eye coordination games, real world face games and the opportunity to control Daniel Radcliffe (aka Harry Potter) in a variety of emotions.

It is not enough merely to teach the emotions, make the lessons fun, earn rewards and play games. Behind the whole set-up is Mind Reading Manager. This sets the parameters for a number of components of the three major sections thus allowing parents, teachers or professionals to track progress of a child, limit time in games, set limits on emotions (e.g. removing the 'romantic' emotions from beginner levels for children), fix levels and more. It is possible to track students' overall engagement with different components, lists of emotions completed, average scores and more.

My own delay in forwarding a book review was that I wanted a chance to test it out for real with a day treatment service (age groups 5 to 9, 10 to 12 and 13 to 18 years). Attendees included those with disruptive behavioural disorders, depression, anxiety and pervasive developmental disorders. The program was particularly suited to group work with children with developmental disorders, but our staff used it for anger management

training, social skills training and reward time for children and teens. When it can be used as a reward, you can learn one more important item, this program is fun! The final word from staff and children was that they were so pleased that separate orders for additional CDs were made and for other mental health programs that came to demonstrations.

The CDs or DVD can be installed on notebook computers, desk top computers, or, our favourite, connected to an LCD projector for group work. Technical support is available and it has proven helpful for us (a couple of minor questions). The cost is reasonable and the quality of the production, directing and acting is all excellent.

My overall conclusion is to support the staff I work with; Simon Baron-Cohen and team have done excellent work for children, youth and mental health professionals everywhere. Thank-you Dr. Baron-Cohen!

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