

Reading Emotions in Others Activity

Visual Emotional Expression

The ability to read the emotions of others is considered a core aspect of emotional intelligence. This activity provides an opportunity for your Mentee to develop the important life skill of reading the emotions of others by deciphering facial expressions. It would be done in a paired activity with yourself as the Mentor also participating. As always, we do suggest that you undertake this in advance of running it yourself. There are a few ways you can do this:

- Using a Mirror – which is less effective as you will be looking at your own image the one you have known since birth. However, you will find you get to notice how your facial expressions show up when expressing various emotions
- With a partner – ideally a buddy Mentor that you are on the development journey with. This means you will be building each other’s awareness and skill concurrently which is a win/win for you both
- With your own coach
- With another third party (setting up for this situation will require a lot of ‘safety framing and crafting on your part)

Watch Outs and Key Points for Set up and Running the Activity

1. This exercise can be confronting, as many people tend to refrain from expressing their emotions in settings where they are not known.
2. It therefore requires some degree of vulnerability and therefore making a safe container is a critical first step.
3. Eye contact needs to be maintained, in a firm but gentle manner, not the grinding eye gaze of a salesperson or interviewer, but of a curious child who remains relaxed and open to a new experience. Participants should not try to “stare the other down,” but rather observe and allow his or her inner experience to arise spontaneously.
4. Softening the eyes – helps this process. We do this by expanding our field of vision sideways and allow the eyes to softly rest on the other
5. Print out a full set of Emotion Cards in order to provide opportunity to practice a range of expressions. If you know your Mentee has any particular challenge with recognising a particular emotion, we encourage you to also make up your own. The Emotion Card print out is available in the [Link to Reference Pack for Reading Emotions in Others Activity](#).
6. In Step 2, it is important to express the emotion as realistically as possible, as it were actually real, and the Mentee is alone and experiencing this emotion in real life.
7. Do **NOT** exaggerate their facial expressions or body language to make the emotion more obvious than it would typically be.

8. A complicating factor in learning to reading others' emotions of others is that we have been taught from a young age to repress and conceal our emotions. We are taught not talk about them, mask them, not display them, nor even feel them. So, it is no surprise this can be a stretch for people to do.
9. Remind the Mentee of this fact. Treat it as an experiment and a journey of discovery.

Instructions for the Activity (Your Practice)

- Provide both with a copy of Facial Cue Hints available in the [Link to Reference Pack for Reading Emotions in Others Activity](#).
- Having a notebook to make notes of what is seen and how it is interpreted is very helpful – and you can keep a record of the grosser and also the more subtle cues
- Make sure you and whomever you are practicing with both have a set of the Emotion Cards. Shuffle the cards and leave them blank side up where they can be reached – we are going to do this in the order of the draw
- Decide who will go first at being the Expressor and then Perceiver
- You will take it in turns
- The Expressor reads the instructions on their card to themselves. They get in touch internally with the memory of the time they felt that emotion.
- Express. Through face and body language without speaking. Eyes may be open or closed whichever feels easiest or the most comfortable
- Whilst the Expression is going on, the Perceiver is to study the face for changes as they access the memory of the emotion – when the perceiver thinks they've got it they can call 'halt'
- Allow the Expressor some time to 'come back' they may like to shake out the emotion by standing up and shaking the body
- Then the process can go one of two ways :
 - The Perceiver can begin by guessing the emotion and explaining what they saw that made them think that – and the Expressor confirms or otherwise **OR**,
 - The Expressor can share the emotion they accessed, the Perceiver confirms or otherwise whether they interpreted it as the Expressor intended and explains what they saw in the facial cues
 - It is often helpful to also provide an interpretation if that is possible **EG.** I noticed your bottom lip start to tremble and I thought you were going to cry
- Swap roles and repeat.
- When the same emotion is expressed by one or the other, it is often also helpful to compare notes on the cues that each noticed as this will provide a richer insight.

Instructions for the Activity (With your Mentee)

- In advance, Provide your Mentee with a copy of Facial Cue Hints available in the [Link to Reference Pack for Reading Emotions in Others Activity](#)
- Make sure they have a notebook to make notes of what is seen and how it is interpreted their own and your comments and feedback.
- As this is a one-way process you will be the one who has the emotion cards. Shuffle the cards and leave them blank side up where you can reach them – you will again do the emotions in the order of the draw.
- In this instance you are the Expressor for each emotion and your Mentee is the Perceiver.
- The process follows the same steps except you don't interpret their emotions. Again, you may:
 - Have the Mentee begin by guessing the emotion and explaining what they saw that made them think that – and you confirms or otherwise **OR**,
 - You may tell the Mentee the emotion you accessed, the Mentee then confirms or otherwise whether they interpreted it as you'd intended and explains what they saw in your facial cues
- This way the Mentee will build up their 'facial' vocabulary and with practice be able to notice more and more subtle clue, in advance of the full-blown emotion being expressed. It will enable discernment of the signs.

Micro-Expressions

Quite a lot has been written about what are called 'micro-expressions. Once your Mentee has started to develop some skill in recognising the grosser facial cues, you may – if they are interested introduce them to the work of Dr Paul Ekman on Micro-expressions. He has postulated that there are seven universally stable facial expressions. We have mentioned this earlier in this module. But for a quick reminder:

- Anger
- Sadness
- Happiness
- Contempt
- Fear
- Disgust
- Surprise

It has been found that these expressions do have variations based on cultural context. But for assisting us in being able to tune into the internal emotional state of another – taking a look at the more subtle nature of facial cues can be quite helpful.

For a very entertaining way to experience understanding these, the Series "Lie to Me" – starring Tim Roth is based on the work of Dr Ekman. It is available on Amazon Prime, Fox, You-Tube or Play-Google.

For a quick overview of the micro-expressions named above. Please go to [*Link to Reference Pack for Reading Emotions in Others Activity*](#)