

Teaching Tips

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Department of Family & Social Medicine Faculty Development E-Newsletter



Recognizing Facial Expressions

Poker players and detectives are known for reading the most minute facial expressions. They know when someone is bluffing or concealing an emotion. Physicians (and medical students) can benefit from developing this skill as well to enhance communication and build rapport using a biopsychosocial model of care.

1. The link with emotion

A half a century of research has shown facial expressions linked with seven common emotions: anger, contempt, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise.

2. Expression can be missed in a blink of an eye

Micro expressions can be less than a tenth of a second and are a sign of hiding an emotion, but not why it is concealed. Acknowledge it and ask something like, "I sensed a small reaction when I asked you about ... can you tell me about it?"

3. Facial expressions are universal

Although some cultural groups believe it is inappropriate to show emotion, facial expressions, including micro expressions, are the same across cultures.



References / Resources:

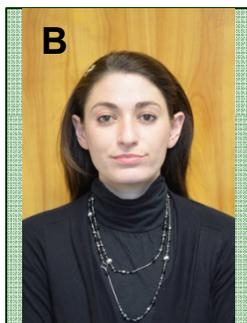
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A
Brows lowered, lids tense, thin lip vermillion



B
Corner of lip is raised and tightened



C
Fake smile or the real thing?



D
Crinkled eyes and raised cheeks

QUIZ: Can you identify the emotions in A and B above? See answers to right.

Clinical Application:

You've delivered news of a positive pregnancy test to your patient and her partner. You're patient smiles, but her eyes and cheeks tell a different story. When her partner leaves the room, you will know how to respond.

Blast from the Past

The December 2011 issue focused on learning styles. Did you know that being able to see a teacher's facial expressions aids the visual learner? Your expressions matter too!

Answers: A. Anger, B. Contempt