



# What a feeling!

## What a Feeling!

Exploring emotional intelligence in *The Sims 4* and in real life.

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### **The Sims 4 in Action**

Watch as senior producer Lyndsay Pearson shows off some of the features of *The Sims 4*, including how emotions can have a big impact on gameplay.

One of the core elements of the human race is the power to feel and express emotions. This ability sets us apart from most of the other species with whom we share the planet. Even if we do our best to hide them, emotions can have a strong impact on our actions, decisions and how we perceive those around us and life in general. That's why it's no surprise that more realistic and impactful emotions were one of the things *The Sims* Studio wanted to focus on in *The Sims 4*.

"Emotions were a natural place for us to concentrate because *The Sims 4* is about bringing the experience back to the Sims themselves and really making them the stars that the game revolves around," said Graham Nardone, a producer on *The Sims 4*.

Sims have always had emotions and the ability to express them, but even in *The Sims 3*, you're not likely to see Sims burst into tears or have other strong emotional reactions unless they're really pushed to

## Moodlet Madness

Since being introduced in *The Sims 3*, Moodlets have been a great way to give players insight into what their Sims are feeling. According to producer Graham Nardone, in *The Sims 4*, we'll have some new Moodlets to look forward to. "For example, there's one set of Moodlets in *The Sims 4* that only Sims with the insane trait can get. I find them hilarious because their names and descriptions are written entirely in Simlish! Long time fans should be able to figure out precisely what they're saying..."

the limit. Even with the addition of Moodlets, your Sims' moods can be quickly determined by whether their plumbobs are green or red. Extreme sadness and extreme anger basically amount to the same thing. That's why more expressive Sims are likely to make *The Sims 4* the most realistic representation of humans in the series to date.

"Allowing our Sims to convey their emotions is very important as it unlocks entirely new avenues of gameplay. For example, you're no longer limited by a Sim who's simply in a bad mood. Instead we've created a range of emotions that allows for branching gameplay where you directly influence your Sims," said Nardone. "A Sim that's feeling furious can get a better workout due to their pent up aggression, a Sim that's tense can lounge in a tub filled with bubbles to melt the stress away, or a Sim that's depressed can craft beautiful poetry or paintings."

Emotions can have similar impacts on people in real life. They can also color our decision-making, specifically decisions that are made quickly. Dr. James Overholser, a board-certified psychologist and professor of psychology at Case Western Reserve University in Ohio, said, "Emotions may provide an intuitive reaction about a situation, reflecting whether we perceive a situation as safe or harmful in some way. However, it can be a problem to allow strong emotional reactions without being filtered through our reasoning skills."

Howard Falco, a self-empowerment expert and author of the forthcoming book, *Time in a Bottle: Mastering the Experience of Life*, agrees that highly emotional states usually don't make for the best decisions.

## Producer Play

Ever wondered how the people who work on *The Sims* actually play *The Sims*?

Producer Graham Nardone has a pretty strong emotional connection to his Sims.

"I'm honestly very protective of my Sims; I play the game with natural aging turned off because I hate the thought of losing them. Something fun that I've been trying recently is to continue playing no matter the situation and just accepting the consequences of my actions. Relinquishing the ability to reload if I don't like an outcome has introduced an entirely new element of the game to me, and I feel especially sad when I happen to accidentally lose a Sim that I had cared about and invested time in.

*The Sims 4* actually helps amplify some of those feelings back at me. In the past, my Sim

"In emotional states one is not in the most grounded state with the truth of reality. Everything is over exaggerated and diluted to a certain degree" Falco said. "In deep fear and depression the possibilities are severely limited as it relates to what is possible in contrast to when one is in a more balanced state of mind. Because of the negative state of mind many of the possibilities are negated or never attempted even though they exist. In a highly joyful or ecstatic state of mind the possibilities are also constricted to only the best outcomes. Examples are the overestimation of ability in sports, the mindset of little risk when on an investing hot streak, or the feeling of general invincibility." While allowing your emotions to play a large role in your decision-making in real life may have dire consequences, *The Sims* franchise has always offered players the chance to vent some of their emotions through gameplay.



"[*The Sims*] is your canvas where you can inject the characters with many different emotions," said Nardone. "If you're having a great day, you can share that with your Sims by making choices that lead to positive emotions such as confidence, elation or feeling inspired. If you want to tell a story, you have a wide variety of gameplay options that allow a true-to-life moment to play out in your Sim's world. It all helps

those feelings back at me. In the past, my Sim would just get a Moodlet saying they were in mourning when another Sim they knew died. Now though, after such a traumatic experience I see them walking with their eyes cast down and their feet shuffling, and they may burst out crying during the middle of doing something as mundane as brewing a pot of tea, and I find myself connecting with them."

These variety of gameplay options that allow a wide range of life moment to play out in your Sim's world. It all helps reinforce one of the tenets of *The Sims*, that the player is directing an intricate life for each and every Sim. Emotions give you a greater ability to do just that."

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structures are being tweaked or expanded to express ideas that didn't come up in the first movie." Still, the challenge and effort has its own rewards, he said, particularly when fans show such a tremendous appreciation for the work. "The amount of effort some devoted fans put into learning [constructed languages] is astonishing to me, and somewhat humbling. There are people out there who now use the language I created more fluently and elegantly than I do myself."

## EVOLUTION AND THE CREATIVE PROCESS

A big part of Cameron's role as voice director for *The Sims* focuses on the development and maintenance of Simlish from one game to the next across the series. Yes, that involves making up a lot of fake words that appear in the game.

"Simlish has grown quite a lot since its inception," he said. "Initially it was almost completely improvised by the actors. While that's still true of the bulk of the voice in game, our approach has changed quite a bit, as you will hear if you play through from *The Sims* to *The Sims 2*, *The Sims 3*, and soon *The Sims 4*."

The transition away from the baby-talk vibe of early Simlish into a more mature and dynamic "language" has been a gradual one, but enunciation has grown clearer, and there's more dependence on repetition rather than randomness with word choices tied to specific interactions in the game.

"Now we have specific words and vocal characteristics that are only used by the actors when portraying certain age groups," added Cameron, "so that elder Sims sound different from teen Sims and adult Sims, and vice versa. Even though it's still gibberish, it is more tightly controlled and manicured gibberish than players heard in the earlier versions of the game."

# THE FUTURE OF SIMLISH

As Simlish continues to grow and expand with each new entry in the series, so does the size of the group of folks working behind-the-scenes to make it an increasingly fun aspect of each game. Starting with only three voice actors in the earlier games, *The Sims* voice team has now tripled to nine different actors. A bigger team makes it possible to have a much greater range of choice in how your Sim characters sound when they speak.

This ongoing expansion extends to *The Sims 4*, which will feature the broadest range of Simlish yet. “We’ve expanded the lexicon, created specific ‘slang’ for different Sim age groups, and placed more focus on object-specific terminology,” said Cameron. “We’ve focused harder than ever before on making each Sim sound unique, and it’s really paying off. The cohesion and attention to detail has really helped Simlish to feel even more like a real language.”