



The University of Edinburgh

News Release

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iPad game seeks to help autistic children develop social skills

Children with autism as young as 18 months could be helped to improve their socialising skills thanks to a new iPad app.

FindMe is a simple game that challenges children to find an onscreen character in different scenarios. Using the iPad's touch screen, players simply tap the character to move onto the next, more complex level.

App developers and Education and Informatics researchers from the University of Edinburgh have collaborated on the game, the first ever attempt to fuse autism research with iPad gaming. The research was funded by the Nuffield Foundation.

As the game progresses, children must contend with more distractions on screen. The game is designed to encourage players to focus on other people and their needs, which people with autism find difficult. Players are rewarded with animations specially designed to appeal to children with autism.

Versions of the game under development will focus on other common difficulties in autism, such as being unable to follow a pointing finger or monitor where another person is looking.

To appeal to children of various nationalities the onscreen character speaks French, German, and English in both British and American accents.

Developers hope that the game will help children with autism practice basic socialising skills before entering the pressurised environment of a nursery or primary school classroom.

Dr Sue Fletcher-Watson, the Nuffield Foundation New Career Development Fellow, said: "Children with autism are often adept with computers. Thanks to the iPad's touchscreen we can now create games for very young children with autism, when it may benefit them most. We hope our app will be helpful to both children with autism and their families."

FindMe will be launched at BETT (the British Educational Training and Technology show), Europe's largest educational technology showcase, on January 11 at London's Olympia.

It is available for download now for free from Apple's App Store.

One of the top universities in the world

FindMe is published by Interface3, an award-winning Edinburgh-based company specialising in designing and developing collaborative and social learning games using interactive tabletop and mobile platforms. Previously it has produced games for PBS Kids in the US as well as an array of education publishers and design agencies.

The app is the first part in a proposed series of University of Edinburgh research into using new technology to provide support for individuals with autism. Following feedback from parents, the FindMe app will be constantly improved and updated. In April, 60 children in the Lothians will take part in research to assess the game's impact on their behaviour.

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