



Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?



Intensive Interaction is an approach that is used to develop positive social communication with people who have communication difficulties.

Intensive Interaction is both highly social and responsive in nature, rather than being directive, or goal or target orientated. The approach focuses on using the '*Fundamentals of Communication*' as a way of means of establishing and developing social communication exchanges.

The Fundamentals of Communication (FoCs) are those communication skills and understandings that usually come before use of language/speech, although Intensive Interaction is now also being used with people who already have some speech and language skills.

These *Fundamentals of Communication* are the social communication capabilities of:

- paying attention to another person
- understanding and using eye contact and facial expressions
- learning to share personal space
- understanding and using sociable physical contacts
- using vocalisations with meaning (for some, speech development)
- taking turns
- enjoying being with another person

Why use Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction is used to meet the social communication needs of people who have a communication and social impairment. It can be used with many groups of people who, for a variety of reasons, may find social engagement difficult, or may be described as 'difficult to reach'.

Intensive Interaction can be used with a range of people of all ages, including (but not limited to):

- Autism Spectrum Conditions
- Speech and Language difficulties
- Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities
- Severe Learning Disabilities
- Multi Sensory impairment

How?

Intensive Interaction uses body language to tune into children with whom we find it difficult to communicate. It involves 'learning their language' and responding, not just to 'what' they do but 'how they do it, since this will tell us how they are feeling. It is more than just copying or mimicking, it means entering their world and working from what it is that their brain finds meaningful.

It is important to note that this strategy has no age limit – it can be used with very young children, teenagers, adults and the elderly!

Intensive Interaction can be used as a way of teaching, or simply as a way of being together. It does not require any specialist equipment, other than a communication partner who is sensitive and 'in tune' with the person they are engaging with.

There are 3 concepts that underpin the use of Intensive Interaction:

1. *Assuming Intentionality* - this is done by responding to a person's actions (or vocalisations) as if they are intentional communications, even if they aren't.
2. *The activity being 'Taskless' in nature* - i.e. there being no set 'task' or 'target' to complete/work towards during an Intensive Interaction engagement; it is the quality of the interaction that is important, not any predetermined outcomes.
3. *Establishing mutual pleasure* - we strive to make every Intensive Interaction engagement enjoyable and therefore intrinsically rewarding; there is no external reward offered or given, just the mutual pleasure of being with a person.

Intensive Interaction Techniques:

Below are the most easily identified social communication practices that are used within Intensive Interaction. You will recognise a lot of these as things that you would naturally do when interacting with a young child or baby.

Sharing personal space

Share proximity in a way that both people accept e.g. somehow lying, sitting, standing or even moving together, touching or apart.

*Vocal echoing*

Copying some aspect of the person's sounds (even any non-symbolic sounds) can be socially acknowledging and even develop into conversation-like exchanges e.g. echoing a person's sounds or vocalisations, perhaps even echoing their breathing patterns. The back and forth pattern mirrors that of a conversation.

Physical contact

Sensitive, sociable physical contact can promote mutual trust and sociability e.g. holding, squeezing or clapping hands together; hand-over-hand games; rhythmically stroking arms or shoulders; walking arm-in-arm; touching foreheads or rubbing noses.

Behavioural mirroring

Copying/mirroring some aspect of the person's posture, movements or behaviour can be socially acknowledging and can develop into dynamic behavioural exchanges e.g. adopting someone's posture, copying any hand movements they make, etc.

*Making or exchanging eye contact*

Sensitive eye contact can be important for exchanging inclusive social signals e.g. games such as pee-po and looking in the mirror together.

Exchanging facial expressions

Using clear and sustained facial expressions with a person creates opportunities for these to be better understood and reciprocated e.g. clear smiling, winking; even pulling faces.

Joint focus activity

This is when both people focus their attention on the same object or activity, structuring their social engagement around this object or activity e.g. jointly exploring objects, books and pictures; doing a structured activity together; reading to or listening to music together. It is important that this activity is chosen by the person you are working with, and you continue to follow their lead through it, rather than direct them.

Turn taking

Turn taking involves two people intentionally sequencing their actions in some way e.g. via sequenced vocal or physical exchanges e.g. clapping or passing things in turns, etc.



Burst-pause sequences

This is when an action is followed by an extended pause, building an expectancy that something is about to happen e.g. hide-and-appear games; playing 'catch' with a 'ready, steady....go' countdown; using noise escalation games that gradually build then abruptly go quiet.

Using 'running commentaries'

The timely use of a positive 'running commentary' on someone's actions, or on the visible actions of others in a shared environment, can provide a socialising element to an engagement e.g. using limited language to describe a person's activity e.g. "wow, great, yeah...", "I can see you looking...", "from me to you..." etc.

Useful Links

The Intensive Interaction (www.intensiveinteraction.org) website has more detailed information on the strategy, resources for purchase, information on training courses and much more.

YouTube – There are lots of video clips of Intensive Interaction being done with a range of people and in a range of environments on Dave Hewitt's YouTube page. Search for *Dave Hewitt Intensive Interaction* on www.youtube.com.