

Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction is a technique which is used to support children who are at an early stage of communication development to develop their communication and interaction skills.

The approach centres on developing positive interactions between your child and those around them. Intensive Interaction creates opportunities for basic communication skills to be supported and developed during natural interactions on a day to day basis. It also provides a way for you to notice the progress your child is making in their interaction and communication skills without the focus being solely on spoken language.

Why use Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction aims to help your child to:

- Develop early relationships with those around them
- Develop their engagement with others and the ability to attend to other people
- Learn to share personal space
- Learn to take part in sequences of activities with other people and take turns
- Learn to understand and use face watching and facial expressions
- Learn to understand and use positive physical contact
- Learn to understand and use non-verbal communication
- Learn to understand and use vocalisations with meaning

How do I get started with Intensive Interaction?

- The best way to get started with Intensive Interaction is to watch what your child does when they are playing on their own. Remember, children can 'play' in lots of different ways so this does not have to involve playing with toys. This may involve looking at how they interact with objects, with activities of interest or simply the environment around them.
- When engaging in Intensive Interaction you should initially start by following your child's lead. This means doing what your child wants to do and not necessarily what you want to do as the adult. This might mean playing with toys in a different way to how you feel they 'should' be played with.
- By mirroring back (or copying) what your child is doing or saying you are 'tuning in' and acknowledging their own unique way of communicating (whether this be through words, vocalisations or actions). This reinforces that you are 'listening' to them and 'speaking their language' whatever this might look or sound like.

So, what should I do?

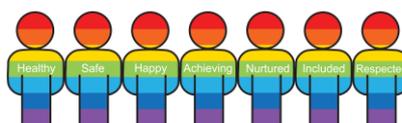
- Look out for face watching. Your child may look in the direction of your face, this DOES NOT need to be direct eye contact which can be uncomfortable for some children. Make sure you try to be at your child's level by getting down on the floor if they are on the floor. If your child

can tolerate it, be face to face but for some children, it may be better to be side to side or a bit further away.

- If your child makes a sound or word, mirror this back. It may feel unusual doing this to start with but it's okay, the more you interact with what they are doing, the more you are supporting positive interactions. Through doing this you can practise vocal turn taking where your child makes a sound and then you make a sound back. Don't insist that your child responds verbally but if they do, this is something to celebrate. You can also extend this by adding a sound or an action to what your child is doing to further their vocalisations. You can change the sound they make into a word, so if they say 'ba' whilst you are playing with a ball you might recast this back as 'ball'.
- As well as mirroring sounds, you can also mirror body movements, facial expressions and play. If your child makes a movement (such as moving their arms, clapping or shaking their head) you can mirror and copy this too. Although no words are involved in this, this is still acknowledging their communication and can develop into the early stages of turn taking.
- Using pausing is a really effective way of extending the actions or vocalisations of a child. Once you have established a routine between you, use pauses to create an opportunity for your child to respond. This might be a short pause or may be longer periods of silence. Silence is a really powerful way of giving space for your child to do something more which then gives you an opportunity to respond to them.
- If your child is enjoying playing with an object, it can be useful to find another of the same, or similar object, to play alongside your child. This gives an opportunity for you to play with the same activity alongside your child to get them used to you playing near them instead of getting too involved too quickly. By establishing playing alongside, this supports development of attention skills. You don't have to copy exactly what your child is doing, you can use this opportunity to extend their play and introduce new (but similar) ideas. For example, if they are pushing a car in a straight line, you might want to introduce a new shape or add a sound alongside the movement. Once your child is able to accept you playing alongside (or maybe show an interest in what you are playing with) it may be that you can start to play with the same toy. This could be as simple as pushing a car back and forth to each other or taking it in turns to spin an item on the floor/table.

Top Tips for Intensive Interaction

- It can feel a bit strange copying a child's actions and activities as an adult, try to feel relaxed when you are sharing an experience with your child and not worry if it feels uncomfortable. The more practice you get, the more natural these interactions will begin to feel.
- It is important to create a safe environment to interact in, where you reduce distractions as much as possible; this could be in a preferred place that your child feels safe in and often means you going to wherever your child is. Remember, you may need to alter the environment to achieve this.
- For some children (especially those with physical needs or who may not be using words) a lot of the touch that they experience can be really functional (e.g. getting children in and out of a wheelchair, having nappy changes, cleaning them up after a messy snack time). Intensive Interaction is a lovely opportunity to develop experiences of positive touch which they may not experience in day to day activities. Examples of positive touch include: squeezing hands or knees, clapping hands together, action songs where touch is involved or sitting close enough to each other to feel touch. Some children may seek a lot of touch such as: big bear hugs, squeezing your face or sitting in tight spaces. Use touch with caution and always talk to a familiar/safe adult about introducing touch, as some children process



touch in a different way to others so this may need to be introduced slowly in a positive manner.

- It can be tempting to remove activities or stop movements that your child is doing to self-regulate but please don't take these activities away from them. Your child might be: rocking, hand flapping, spinning or flapping a piece of paper. They may be doing these things to help them regulate their sensory differences, emotions or for general regulation. It might be worth trying to join in with some of these activities and seeing what impact it has on your interactions.
- Look out for how your child is progressing with their interaction and communication skills by watching for the following stages of interaction. Remember that their interaction may vary on a day to day basis based on their mood, regulation, environment, activity and they may not move through each of these stages in order. However, it is useful to notice how they are responding to you so you can identify small steps of progress. Look out for when they are showing that they:
 - **Notice** when someone is sharing their space or responding to them
 - **Accept someone sharing their space**
 - **Accept when someone responds** to their actions/vocalisations/interests
 - **Respond to someone who is interacting with them** by showing signs of interest, surprise, enjoyment, frustration or dissatisfaction.
 - **Engage with someone who is interacting with them** by sustained looking or listening, repeatedly following events through movements of their eyes, head or other body parts.
 - **Participate with someone who is interacting with them.** This might be by showing signs of anticipation of what you are going to do, taking turns in a sequence of events or intentionally passing signals (whatever these signals might look like) repeatedly back and forth.
 - **Becoming more actively involved in the interaction with someone.** They might show this by making an active effort to reach out or consistently join in with the interaction or respond in some way related to what you are doing through their actions, words, vocalisations, signs or gestures in a consistent and meaningful way.
 - **Initiating (requesting or seeking) interaction with others.** They might show this by starting an activity themselves and seeking to engage another person in that activity.

Remember:

Intensive interaction should be enjoyable for both children and adults. If your child appears distressed or overwhelmed by any of your actions, think about how you can modify what you are doing or create more space to reduce any pressure on them.

In Intensive Interaction it is important to reflect on the quality of the interaction (what actually happens) instead of the quantity of the interaction (how long it lasts). Although engaging in intensive interaction regularly will support your child to further their interaction skills, it's much better to have a 1 minute positive interaction than a 5 minute more challenging one.

