

Introduction to Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive interaction is a play-based approach to helping children develop early, pre-speech communication and interaction skills, such as eye contact, facial expressions, the ability to copy sounds, and shared attention.

It can be used with children who have difficulty communicating, particularly those who are not communicating verbally. It is particularly useful for autistic children, including those who are at an early stage in learning how to communicate, and those who have some speech but would benefit from developing their communication skills.

It was developed in the 1980s by Dave Hewett and Melanie Nind, who were working with children with severe learning difficulties, and is based upon their findings regarding communication styles used by parents/ carers in interactions with infants.

This can include:

- Having a “conversation” at the baby’s level
- Watching the baby carefully for any sign of interest and enjoyment
- Letting the baby lead but taking turns
- Responding to things the baby does
- Celebrating facial expressions and noises-often imitating and joining in
- Taking pauses: Observe, Wait, Listen...

What does intensive interaction involve?

The adult plays with the child, responding to what the child does by imitating and joining in. They then develop the play into activities and games that explore and practise communication skills. The interaction goes at the child’s pace, following their interests, and the adult pauses to watch what the child does next before responding. The session stops when the child has had enough. To start with, the sessions may only last a few minutes, but can increase as the child’s skills develop. Intensive interaction happens whenever there is a chance to do it. For young children, this might be several times a day.

What to respond to in Intensive Interaction?

Vocalisations – grunts, murmurs, humming, hissing, hooting, all voice noises.

Other noises made with the mouth – clicks, blowing, smacking lips, blowing raspberries.

Body noises – slapping or tapping parts of the body, walls, and furniture, stamping, clapping.

Movements – hand movements, rocking, swaying, head bobbing, spinning.

Facial expressions – smiles, grimaces, mouth opening or closing, blinks, sticking out tongue.

Physical contact – pats, taps, reaching to hold you, hugging.

Eye gaze – brief eye contact, face turned toward you, looking at favourite items.

Stereotyped behaviours – some children with additional needs may have stereotyped movements or engage in repetitive actions. Joining in these can sometimes foster initial engagement.

Anything else the child engages in – As long as it is safe and appropriate

How do we respond in Intensive Interaction?

Be imaginative, playful, creative, and engaged and lose your inhibitions

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By imitating - providing a recognisably similar imitation of what the other person just did but combined with clear signals of enjoyment from you.

By joining in – joining in will usually mean an extending response, e.g., joining with rocking, clapping, and again signalling you are enjoying.

By saying something – a good celebration might be to simply say something approving e.g., “yeah,” “oh yes” “great noise”

By being dramatic – a momentary behaviour from the other person is rewarded by something gently “explosive” from you e.g., a sudden upright movement with a delighted face, a sudden drawback with an expression of shock, an excited exaggerated noise e.g., “ohhhhh”

By non-verbal response – smiling, widening eyes, anything you do with your face, nodding or moving your head, any significant body language you use as a response.

By providing a simple running commentary – “oh up, down” “spin, spin, spin” “jumping, jumping, up and down”

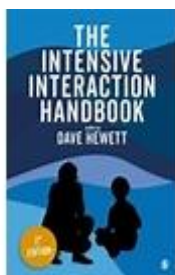
Singing a song – Change familiar song words to narrate what the child is doing e.g. “This is the way we jump up and down,” “Matthew likes jumping, jumping...” respond and adapt as the child changes actions/ pauses.

Make sounds – Respond to movements with fun symbolic sounds e.g., “wheee” for spinning, “boing” jumping etc.

By pausing and waiting – Never underestimate the power of a pause in supporting the child to notice your actions or to allow you to effectively observe and respond to the child’s actions etc.

Respond to all actions as if it intentional and or communicative - (even if it is not) by doing this regularly you help the child to realise they influence how you respond.

Useful References and Links



The Intensive interaction Handbook by Dave Hewett
www.intensiveinteraction.org