



Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive interaction developed as an approach to teaching the pre-speech fundamentals of communication to children and adults with severe learning difficulties and/or autism, who are still at an early stage of communication development.

The approach was developed during the nineteen-eighties by the team of staff working at Harperbury Hospital School Herfordshire. Dave Hewett Ph.D and Melanie Nind Ph.D, were teachers at Harperbury School, and they carried out Intensive Interaction research projects at the school as part of the development work. They have produced a number of books and also run training courses. Phoebe Caldwell is another well-known developer of Intensive Interaction working more specifically with people with autism.

Who is Intensive Interaction for?

Intensive Interaction is designed to meet the learning needs of people who are still at early stages of communication development. This may include:

- people who have severe and complex learning difficulties
- people who have very severe learning difficulties
- people who have profound and multiple learning difficulties
- people who have multi-sensory impairments
- people who have a diagnosis of autism

Intensive Interaction can be extremely beneficial across a wide range of ability. For example:

- A person who is very 'difficult to reach', living a socially isolated life, perhaps having a range of self-stimulatory behaviours and not showing motivation to be with other people.
- A person who may be social in many ways and have many successful interaction activities with other people, but still need to develop further knowledge and ability. This might include learning to use and understand eye contact and facial expressions, learning to take turns in exchanges of behaviour or developing and extending vocalisations toward the threshold of speech.
- A person with some speech and language ability, but would still benefit from further learning and development in the area of the 'fundamentals of communication'.



What are the fundamentals of communication that Intensive Interaction can help develop?

These may include:

1. Learning to give brief attention to another person.
2. To have fun, to play and to be able to share joint enjoyment and take pleasure from simply being with another person
3. Being able to share personal space.
4. Learning to extend those attentions and to concentrate on another person.
5. Learning different ways of communicating during shared activities (e.g. meaningful vocalisations, facial expression, gesture, eye contact etc.)
6. Taking turns in exchanges of behaviour.
7. Using and understanding eye contacts.
8. Using and understanding facial expressions.
9. Using and understanding non-verbal communication such as gesture and body language.
10. Learning use and understanding of physical contacts.
11. Learning use and understanding of vocalisations, having your vocalisations become more varied and extensive, then gradually more precise and meaningful.

What additional benefits and development can Intensive Interaction promote?

- ✓ Challenging behaviours may reduce and the person may be easier to be with.
- ✓ It may become easier to get their attention generally and to get them to participate.
- ✓ They may become open to trying new activities at other times and in different settings.
- ✓ They may become more confident and assertive about initiating communication with the people they have built relationships with in Interaction sessions.
- ✓ They may become less remote and more ready to be amongst a group.
- ✓ Attention skills are likely to be extended leading to more readiness for learning.



How does Intensive Interaction work – what are the principles?

Intensive Interaction is highly practical - the only equipment needed is a sensitive person to be the interaction partner.

The core principles are:

- Provide focused quality 1-1 time
- Tune in sensitively – be aware of all the signals from the person – facial expression, body language, gestures, movement, noises, vocalisations
- Let the other person lead and feel in control
- Be responsive – build on the content and flow of the session by responding to things they do
- The key responses are – imitation – copying – joining in
- Use simple behaviour and language
- Allow pauses – give the other person time to think, process and respond. Resist the desire to drive the activity forward
- Be aware of signals that the person wants some space or ‘time-out’ from interacting with you. If they seem to want to stop – stop for the time being or end the session completely.
- Be aware if the person is becoming too aroused or excited by the interaction – if they do, regulate your own response to help them calm down.
- Enjoy it and celebrate shared enjoyment with the other person!
- The 3 ‘R’s – Responsiveness – Repetition - Repertoire

The Intensive Interaction approach also includes a range of techniques, such as:

- Physical contact
- Eye contact
- Vocal echoing
- Exchanging nonverbal communication, including eye contact and facial expression
- Behavioural mirroring
- Turn taking
- Running commentaries
- Joint focus activity

(See ‘Intensive Interaction Top Tips’ handout for more...)



Supporting ongoing progress

- Carry-out regular recording of skills, activities enjoyed and progress. Video is ideal but observation on a recording form (see recording form on the shared drive in the Intensive Interaction folder) is also helpful. Sometimes we may miss progress if it is slow over time without reflective review or may be inadvertently failing to respond to a subtle communication without this.
- Make sure the team regularly shares what they are doing in their sessions and how the person is responding.
- Have some common communication goals for sessions. This helps the person maximise their chance of further developing emergent skills.
- Provide opportunity for mutual exploration of new toys or activities by regularly adding to existing favourites and carrying out Intensive Interaction sessions in different settings.
- When dealing with requests to repeat something - If appropriate – gradually raise your expectations of the type of communication the person is required to give before you do repeat. For example, you may start by accepting eye contact alone – then move to eye contact plus a grunt – and in the end be expecting a two word request such as ‘more squeezing’.

Why use Intensive Interaction?

There are a range of benefits to using this approach, including (but not limited to):

- ✓ Increasing understanding and use of the fundamentals of non-verbal communication (e.g. attention and listening, eye contact, turn taking, and so on - see points outlined above for more)
- ✓ Increasing understanding and use of the fundamentals of verbal communication (e.g. meaningful vocalisations)

Who can deliver Intensive Interaction?

A range of people can implement Intensive Interaction on a one to one and regular basis, including family members, carers, professionals and teachers. It is important that those implementing Intensive Interaction understand the principles underpinning the approach and have training by a Speech and Language Therapist on how to facilitate two way communication using the Intensive Interaction approach.



Evidence for Intensive Interaction

Research into the effectiveness of Intensive Interaction has predominantly taken the form of small-scale case studies, where the general finding is that clients have demonstrated increased social responsiveness (Firth, 2006; Goldbart & Caton, 2010).

Useful Resources

- ✓ YouTube Videos demonstrating Intensive Interaction
E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJruQPRx3Jk>
- ✓ www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk
- ✓ Facebook: 'Intensive Interaction Users'