



Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction is a practical approach to teaching and supporting the development of fundamental communication and social skills in children and adults with severe, profound or complex learning disabilities and/or autism.

Rather than focusing on cognitive tasks or formal language, it is grounded in the philosophy that all communication is learned through social interaction. It utilises the "pre-speech" fundamentals of communication used by typically developing infants to interact with caregivers before acquiring language.

The Core Principles

Intensive Interaction is based on the following foundational concepts:

- **Communication as a Social Activity:** It prioritises the building of a trusting, pleasurable and mutually beneficial relationship.
- **Following Their Lead:** The facilitator does not set the agenda. Instead, they observe, join in and mirror the individual's behaviours, movements and vocalisations.
- **Reciprocity (Turn-taking):** Establishing a 'conversation' without words. This involves pausing to allow the individual to respond to create a back-and-forth flow.
- **Child-Led Pacing:** The interaction proceeds at the individual's pace, not the facilitator's.
- **Playfulness and Engagement:** The focus is on shared enjoyment, easing the pressure to perform or to get it right.

The Fundamentals of Communication

The approach targets the essential "pre-speech" building blocks, including:



Fundamental Skill	Description
Use of Eye Contact	Developing the ability to look at and engage with another person.
Shared Attention	Learning to focus on the same object, activity or interaction together.
Turn-taking	Understanding the rhythm of 'my turn, your turn'.
Sharing Personal Space	Becoming comfortable with and initiating proximity to others.
Use of Vocalisations	Encouraging the use of sounds to communicate and express emotion.
Facial Expressions	Developing the ability to mirror and respond to emotional cues.

Practical Implementation: How to Do It

- **Be Observant:** Sit near the individual (at their level) and watch their body language, sounds and actions.
- **Mirror and Match:** Gently imitate what the individual is doing. If they clap, you clap, if they make a sound, you make a similar sound.
- **Create Gaps:** Introduce pauses. This provides space for the individual to initiate the next turn or react to your presence.
- **Use Exaggeration:** Use expressive facial expressions and clear, simple body movements to make the interaction engaging.
- **Stay Calm and Attuned:** Maintain a relaxed, non-demanding presence. Your goal is to be a reliable and fun social partner.
- **Avoid Demand:** Do not use instructions, questions or commands. Remove the pressure for the individual to produce specific responses.



Who Benefits?

Intensive Interaction is highly effective for individuals who:

- Are at an early stage of communication development.
- Experience high levels of social isolation.
- Show frequent, repetitive or self-stimulatory behaviours.
- Experience difficulties with traditional, formal communication methods (for example, PECS or Makaton).

Why It Matters?

By providing the individual with a successful social engagement experience, Intensive Interaction helps to:

- Reduce anxiety and social withdrawal.
- Increase self-esteem by validating the individual's way of communicating.
- Build confidence in initiating and sustaining social contact.
- Provide a foundation for introducing more complex communication methods later.

Note: Intensive Interaction is not a quick fix. It is a long-term approach that relies on consistency, patience and the building of a genuine emotional connection between the facilitator and the individual.