



Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction is an approach to the teaching of early communication attainment. These communication attainments are the outcomes, knowledge and abilities that in usual development commence at birth and progress through to the development of speech and language in a typically developing child. For children with atypical language and communicative development these skills need to be taught explicitly, and Intensive Interaction provides a way to do this. The learning intentions or outcomes of Intensive Interaction are usually summarised under the heading of the '**Fundamentals of Communication**', these being:

- enjoying being with another person
- developing the ability to attend to that person
- concentration and attention span
- learning to do sequences of activity with another person
- taking turns in exchanges of behaviour
- sharing personal space
- using and understanding eye contacts
- using and understanding facial expressions
- using and understanding physical contacts
- using and understanding other non-verbal communications
- vocalising and using vocalisations meaningfully (including speech)
- learning to regulate and control arousal levels
- (probably) the development of neural links
- emotional development and associated and well-being outcomes

(Nind and Hewett 1994, 2001, 2005)

Doing Intensive Interaction

The essential idea behind intensive interaction is to support children and young people to exhibit increasingly complex communicative behaviours. The gradual incremental progress of communicative behaviours can be described in terms of a framework which I have placed into a table below alongside some examples of behaviours you might see and suggestions for the type of interactions used to elicit the behaviour.



Communicative Behaviour	Example of Behaviour	Example of Strategy
Encounter: Child is able to tolerate an adult playing alongside them but shows no interest or awareness of their play.	Child playing with Lego allows adult to play alongside with their own Lego without any outward distress nor any sign they have noticed.	Playing near the child and gradually moving closer until alongside the child, without interfering directly in their play.
Awareness: Child notices or fleetingly focusses on actions of adult playing alongside them.	Looks up at adult who is tapping rhythmically on a drum, then looks at drum, then returns attention to own play.	Copying child's actions and/or vocalisations.
Attention & Response: Child begins to respond (inconsistently) to what is happening in an interactive play episode.	Child shows an emotional response (e.g. laughing or shouting) whilst attending to adult actions.	Making toy objects do unexpected things, e.g. toy knight falling from castle punctuated with sound effects.
Engagement: Child shows consistent attention to an interactive episode.	Child watches adult actions intently and for a sustained period (e.g. a minute or two). Perhaps showing emotion at specific points in an activity.	Adult says 'ready, steady, go' and blows bubbles; child shows some anticipatory response before adult blows the bubbles, (e.g. hand flapping).
Participation: Child shows consistent anticipation of and response to interactive episode, engaging in some reciprocal actions.	Child engages in turn taking when building a tower.	Hand over hand interaction initially accompanied by use of 'your turn, my turn' visual when engaging in turn taking activity.
Involvement: Child makes active efforts to join in and even comment on interaction, imposing some of their own choice onto it.	Child initially copies your beat on a drum, then makes beat of their own for you to copy; laughs when you do so.	Encourage choice and child direction; e.g. 'should I use the blue or the red block next on the tower?'
Child Initiated Interaction: Child independently starts a non-repetitive interaction and engages another person in an activity with social intent.	Child brings you to small world play area and engages in some reciprocal play with you, using different toys in different ways.	Introducing new, creative & unpredictable elements into play with the child.

NB – it is important to understand that in some cases this progression will not be linear; for example, a child may go from awareness to participation very rapidly. There may also be small regressions; for example going from participation to attention & response after a half term holiday. Both of these things are okay as long as the child makes progress with their communicative interaction behaviours that is relatively stable and sustained over time.