

A bit about...

Intensive Interaction strategies promote positive relationships by focusing on the foundations of early interactions; being attentive, showing interest, anticipating, sharing, turn taking and building trust/respect. This practical approach can be particularly useful with children with complex communication issues often associated with neurodevelopmental conditions. As the relationship develops, awareness, understanding and interaction is increased, leading to more meaningful communication.



"Intensive Interaction works on early interaction abilities - how to enjoy being with other people - to relate, interact, know, understand and practice communication routines."

www.intensiveinteraction.org

For more information about the origin and development of Intensive Interaction please see this [video interview](#) with its creator Dr Dave Hewett OBE.

What can you do?

If you are supporting a child and having some difficulty interacting and building a relationship with them, arrange short spells of time to work together. 5 to 10 minutes could be enough to start with:

- Let the child take the lead. Begin by simply copying what they are doing; if they are playing with a train pick up a similar one and copy them.
- Initially resist the urge to talk, comment or make suggestions relating to what the child is doing. Immerse yourself in the moment and continue to copy them.
- Be respectful of their space and come in gently to start with, possibly from the side if face to face seems challenging to them.
- Copy the child's physical movements; if the child darts over to the other side of the room or jumps/flaps hands, you do the same.
- Read the subtle signs of communication that may emerge e.g. eye contact, facial expression, etc. and return them.
- If they vocalise, return the vocalisation in the same way.
- If a vocalisation is used with intent, recognise it as a positive attempt to communicate and try to interpret its message e.g. it may be to communicate that you are in that person's space, therefore continue but perhaps create slightly more distance between the two of you. It may be a request for 'more' or to show pleasure.
- The session should be enjoyable and playful, so it is important to read and interpret any communication signals, particularly if they appear negative. You may have to keep the session very short to begin with if the child shows any signs of discomfort or distress.
- To begin with you may only receive a flashing sideways glance when the child begins to realise that someone is doing the same as them, but to receive this is very positive. It shows that the child has noticed you and has given some attention to you.
- Repetition is key to building on this approach. Try to find time to engage in this way regularly and with different activities. The breakthroughs can be very rewarding.
- Once the child has accepted you into their space, the relationship could naturally develop into a more reciprocal one over time.
- There may be an increase in laughing, eye contact, vocalising, sharing, turn taking, commenting, and suggesting.

Building Attachment and Learning through Play - The SELFIE Steps

Now it is "give and take", you can think of ways to extend the play to make it more interesting.	E xtend their play
Once you are playing together, you can try new ideas. If the child takes them up, you are off! If not, be patient, they may have a better idea ...	I nitate new play ideas
At first, follow what the child is doing. Imitate them, or do the same things. Watch out for the child making an initiative to you, and then follow that!	F ollow their play
Using words to give play meaning: • makes play richer • builds attachment • grows language & thinking skills Find some ideas in the "Label Box"	L abel their play
Smile and laugh if you can. Accept anything they do that is safe - it is their play.	E nter their play
Watch your child play, and let them know you can see them!	S ee their play

If any stage does not work, go back to the previous one!

The steps above can be supported by using the **SELFIE Steps - Building Attachment and Learning through Play**.

Intensive interaction

Hints and Tips!



- Relax, go with the flow; be 'in the moment' to help develop attuned interactions.
- Remember to have fun and make activities motivating.
- Once you have established a positive relationship and understand what may upset or motivate the child, you can use this to support their learning.
- Be patient, progress may only show in very small, subtle steps but each one is worthwhile.
- Use and share the information you learn from your interactions with the child and apply it to other situations.

The next step might be to...

- Extend the play by doing something different rather than copying but with the same toy. You may find your attempt is rejected so just return to copying. Try again another time.
- Eventually you may feel that you can take a slight lead or initiate play every so often e.g. you might pick up a different toy and say 'Ball!' Offer it to the child or roll it to them. See how the child responds. They may reject your initiation, or they may divert their attention to you.
- Try to develop a non-threatening balance between copying and initiating until the child feels comfortable.
- Once this positive relationship of trust and respect has developed the child may be ready to receive more suggestions and requests e.g. sharing toys, activities and looking at pictures or books.
- By engaging in this strategy, you will begin to know the child very well and be able to advise others regarding your interpretation of subtle communications signs.
- As part of being a reflective practitioner you could share your thoughts and observations with parents/carers, colleagues or the Speech and Language Therapist.

More ideas:

- Observe a child to find out:
 - What interests/motivates them - what activity works best?
 - What upsets them – are there any sensory issues?
 - How they react in different environments and situations.
- Observe another adult, who is familiar with using the Intensive Interaction approach, for more ideas.
- Watch sections of Intensive Interaction on the DVD by Dave Hewett or short YouTube clips of others, such as Phoebe Caldwell, practising this strategy.
- Consider enrolling on a CPD course on Intensive Interaction.
- Share with parents/carers and other professionals involved with the child how you are working to build a relationship supporting the child's communication.
- Ask a colleague to take some photos for the child's profile, to show changes over time.



Useful videos

YouTube videos:

To explore more video examples of theory and practice in action go to [Dave Hewett's YouTube video channel](#).