



Evidence-Based Intervention: Intensive Interaction

1. Introduction

Intensive Interaction is a person-centered communication approach, encouraging the development of early communication skills and building better relationships with children and young people (CYP) (e.g. enjoy being with others, relate, interact, know, understand, and practice communication routines). The approach values CYP as individuals, and practitioners adjust their communication style to facilitate a mutual connection.

2. Purpose of Intervention

The primary goals of Intensive Interaction are to:

- Develop **early communication skills** (e.g. turn-taking, vocalisations, shared attention)
- Build **foster emotional connection**
- Promote **social inclusion** through enjoyable interactions
- **Empower the individual** (the practitioner adapts to the communication style of the CYP)

3. Target Audience

- Pupils who have an **autism** diagnosis.
- Pupils with **severe or profound learning disabilities**
- Pupils with **complex communication needs** (typically in **early years, primary**, and **special education settings**, but also appropriate for older pupils with similar needs)

4. Who Can Deliver the Intervention

Those delivering Intensive Interaction should have been trained in the approach. This may include:

- Family members and caregivers
- Speech and language therapists.
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinators (SENDCOs)
- Learning Support Assistants.
- Teachers.

5. Activities that might take place in a session

A typical session takes place in a quiet, comfortable space with minimal distractions

- **Initiation:** The practitioner joins the CYP, physically and emotionally, without imposing.
- **Mirroring and responding:** Copying or gently responding to the CYP's actions, sounds, or movements.
- **Turn-taking and pacing:** The practitioner follows the CYP's lead, allowing pauses and repetitions.
- **Shared enjoyment:** The focus is on mutual enjoyment, not reaching a certain stage/activity.
- **Expanding the interaction:** Once engagement and trust is achieved, the practitioner can introduce subtle variations to encourage new responses.
- **Building communication fundamentals:** E.g. if appropriate and comfortable, eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, vocalizations...

Not all CYP will progress through all activities and practitioners should meet the CYP at their level of readiness.



6. Frequency and Duration

Sessions can last anywhere from 5–30 minutes, depending on the individual's engagement. Sessions should be delivered regularly (e.g., daily or several times a week), and often integrated into everyday routines.

7. Key Principles

- **Respect for the individual's communication style:** Valuing how the CYP naturally communicates (e.g. perhaps they prefer sounds, movements or gestures rather than formal language).
- **Responsiveness and reciprocity:** The practitioner responds to the actions and interests of the CYP (e.g. imitating, mirroring) to create a two-way exchange.
- **Enjoyment and emotional attunement:** Sessions are playful, relaxed and promote emotional connection.
- **Fundamentals of communication:** Early development of communication skills.

8. Training and Implementation

Training is available through the **Intensive Interaction Institute** or accredited providers. Courses include the following modules:

- Module 1: Introduction to Intensive Interaction
- Module 2: Reflective Practitioner
- Module 3: Mentoring Practitioner
- Module 4: In-service Trainer
- Continuing Professional Development

9. Evidence and Outcomes

There is over 30 years of research suggesting Intensive Interaction leads to observable improvements in social communication for CYP including:

- Increased social anticipation, initiation and engagement.
- More complex and varied vocalizations.
- Increased eye-contact, facial expressions, and turn-taking.
- Greater emotional connection and rapport with staff.

See the following link for research

papers: committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/135528/pdf/

10. Feedback

- CYP often smile, reach out, initiate play and seem to enjoy the interactions.
- Parents have described feeling more connected to their CYP. They have also described feeling more empowered and capable of supporting their CYP's communication needs.
- School staff report increased engagement, attention and want to interact. This supports better classroom inclusion.

11. Further Information and Resources

- [Intensive Interaction - Fundamentals of Communication](#)
- [Intensive Interaction - Sense](#)
- [Intensive Interaction - Building relationships with people who have profound learning disabilities and complex needs](#)
- [Intensive Interaction: Theoretical Perspectives : Hewett, Dave: Amazon.co.uk: Books](#)