**Intensive Interaction Fact Sheet – The basics**

**What is it?**

Using the principles of Intensive Interaction gives us a way of ‘being’ with someone –building a relationship - of communicating socially - with someone who does not find this kind of communication easy.

Social communication is really important – we all enjoy having a good chat – it makes us feel happy and valued and we would hate to be without it. It is part of our everyday lives and helps us build and maintain good relationships.

For people who have complex communication needs this kind of social communication can be difficult for all sorts of reasons. Intensive Interaction is an approach for developing early communication skills in children and adults who have autism, severe learning difficulties and profound and multiple learning difficulties, or those who are still at early stages of development. The approach focuses on teaching the Fundamentals of Communication – the communication and interaction skills we learn before speech development.

This can include:

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| * Using eye contact | * Being aware of other people around us |
| * Turn taking in interaction | * Learning familiar sequences |
| * Using physical contact | * Using pre-speech vocalisation (the noises we make before we can say words) |
| * Developing concentration | * Enjoying time with other people |
| * Using non-verbal communication like facial expression and body language. | * Regulating our arousal levels for sensory input. |

The approach is based on understanding how infants are able to learn these crucial communication abilities through enjoyable interactions with their caregivers. Intensive interaction borrows processes from this early communication development. It is guided by principals that the parent or care giver usually builds interactions around the actions and behaviours of the infant often replicating and building on these behaviours to develop communication.

We are very aware that the people we are talking about are adults and should be viewed as such. We are simply ‘borrowing’ strategies from the parent/baby interaction because they are so fundamental to good communication and relationship building.

We also recognise that many of the strategies continue to exist in communication between adults –though it looks very different.

**How do I do it?**

The main idea is that you are able to spend time interacting with your learner in a mutually enjoyable way.

The interactions in themselves should be led by the learner and should be taskless. This means that you are not trying to complete an activity during the interaction and the quality of the communication is more important than any activity you may be doing.

You need to assume some communicative intent to your learner’s actions. (Even if you are not sure) Interpret their actions to build a conversation. You could try doing this by giving a commentary on their actions.

It is important that you are good at watching and observing your learner so you can respond to any communicative attempt as well as gauge their levels of arousal and enjoyment.

There is no set way to go about intensive interaction and it should be led by your learner and their interests/ enjoyment.

**Ideas to use in your interactions: (you can use these in combination as part of your interactions)**

-**Turn Taking**: It is important that you share and acknowledge an exchange, in whatever form it might take, and take turns. You could try doing this through, clapping, passing objects between you, and sequences of actions.

**-Eye Contact**: eye contact is a really important way for us to give and receive inclusive communication. We can incorporate this by e.g. making dramatic glances; looking in mirrors together, making and braking eye contact in bursts.

-**Physical Contact:** Physical contact that is done sensitively taking into account the individuals needs is a core component of the approach. This may include; holding or playfully squeezing another's hands, clapping or hand-over-hand games, massaging hands or feet and holding hands. This should always be done following the learners lead.

**-Share Personal Space:** For many learners just the, experience of having someone close by in a mutual space e.g. lying/sitting/standing together, quietly or otherwise, touching or apart can be pleasant and comforting.

**-Vocal Echoing:** echoing vocalisations (including sounds that are not words) can develop conversation-like sequences, with both partners giving and receiving important feedback e.g. echoing of verbal or non-verbal vocalisation; try using your voice in lots of different ways.

**-Behavioural Mirroring:** mirroring (copying in a sensitive manner) a person’s behaviour can develop into action sequences that involve both partners e.g. mirroring dance moves, copying actions such as drumming on an object or other movements.

**- Focusing on an Activity Together:** This is where you focus your attention on the same activity or object, building interaction around whatever you are doing. This could include:

* Commenting on what your learner is doing
* Listening to music together
* Looking at objects together and physically exploring them
* Reading stories together
* visually or physically exploring objects together (physical objects, photographs, magazines); moving
* Doing activities together such as playing with a ball, or other sensory items.

-**Taking time to Pause** : Make sure when you are doing activities or even interacting, you leave gaps for your learner to have chance to respond, to build anticipation and expectancy within an activity e.g. hide-and-appear games; pausing in a song, building noise and escalation games.

-**Using Body Language and Facial Expressions:** using facial expressions and body language with communicative intent, and creating opportunities for your learner to copy if wanted; e.g. smiles, winks, pulling faces, tongue poking.

If you find it daunting setting out on an interaction there are many approaches that incorporate intensive interaction into a more structured format such as; sensory stories, bag books and more. See the hand out on ‘Waking up Sensory Story’ for more information.

**Where can I get more information?**

www.IntensiveInteraction.co.uk

This is the ‘official’ Intensive Interaction website, now with lots of information about the approach and how to get started. It also has; a range of downloadable resources, details of the UK Regional Support Networks (with upcoming meetings and contact details) and Blogs.

<https://www.sense.org.uk/get-support/information-and-advice/communication/intensive-interaction/>

Sense gives an outline of intensive interaction and how it can be beneficial for those with complex disabilities and those who are deafblind.