



# Intensive Interaction

## **What is it?**

Valuing People Now (Department of Health, 2009; page 38) describes Intensive Interaction “*as an approach to facilitating two-way communication with people with severe or profound learning disabilities and/or autism, who are still at an early stage of communication development. It can be used to teach people fundamental communication or to provide them with a means to enjoy being expressive and feeling connected.*” More recently the principles of the approach are being used with people with late-stage dementia and people with more moderate learning disabilities with some speech.

The approach has since been featured in the Mencap Communication Guidelines published in 2010 and in *Raising Our Sights*, the report written by Jim Mansell in 2010. *Raising Our Sights* concluded that “there is great potential here to provide a better quality of life” for people by using Intensive Interaction. It can be seen as a practical way to develop rapport and therefore an integral part of a Positive Behavioural Support programme.

In 2013, a series of eleven guides were produced as a result of this work, published by Mencap and the PMLD Network. Intensive Interaction is specifically mentioned in several of these guides. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists’ Five Good Communication Standards (2013), produced in response to the Winterbourne View scandal, also recommends this approach.

Intensive Interaction is a way of building and developing relationships with people who have limited communication abilities and who may be socially isolated. In the interactions we are aiming to be **responsive** rather than directive, thereby giving the person a sense of control and ensuring the communication is on their terms.

## **Why use it?**

Using Intensive Interaction ensures that we communicate with people using their preferred methods and style. In effect it says to the person: “You are good to be with, as you are.” It therefore provides acceptance and promotes emotional engagement. The evidence base shows increases in smiling, eye-contact, social initiation, vocalisations, socially significant physical contact and improved levels of joint attention.

## **Where can I do it?**

Anywhere, any time, any place! As long as it suits the person and they are open to an Intensive Interaction session then it is appropriate. It is important also that you give them your full, uninterrupted attention. It is best to have structured sessions that are planned ahead as well as spontaneous interactions, so progress can be more easily monitored and one’s practice evaluated through some self-reflection and critical analysis. Video is the best form of record-keeping.

## How do I do it?

Start by simply being with the person, quietly and gently observing...Tune in and become aware of their focus of attention, their movements and gestures, their vocalisations (if any). Now, gradually think if you can construct an interactive exchange based on what **they** are doing.

You may start by mirroring body posture. Don't worry about getting it exactly the same – it is more about responding than copying. Join in with the rhythm of their breathing. Join in with any vocalisations. Seek out eye-contact. Watch them closely. Look for any cues – positive ones (enjoyment, smiles, eye-contact etc.) and negative ones (discomfort, restlessness) and respond appropriately.

Try some of the following: games, imitation, turn-taking, pausing, watching, waiting, repetition, eye contact, physical touch, facial expression, expectancy, rhymes, use of names, limiting verbal overload, celebrating behaviours...

Remember!

- That the use of Intensive Interaction should be in the person's care plan and agreed by their circle of support / team of carers.
- Any questions or doubts – discuss with your line manager and/or make a referral through your Learning Disability Team.
- Ensure the sessions are planned, recorded and reviewed.

There is no set way to do Intensive Interaction. It is a person-centred form of communication so that although we start with a set of common principles, we need to develop a way that it works best for each individual.

## Who can help me get started?

Jules McKim

Intensive Interaction Co-ordinator, Psychology Services, Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, Oxford

01865 228116 m. 07909 127564

Email: [jules.mckim@southernhealth.nhs.uk](mailto:jules.mckim@southernhealth.nhs.uk)

I am part of the Learning Disability Teams in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire and receive referrals to develop Intensive Interaction for individuals.

## Further information

Website [www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk](http://www.intensiveinteraction.co.uk)

**Books:** *A Practical Guide to Intensive Interaction* Nind and Hewett (2001). Published by BILD.

**DVDs:** "Creative Conversations: Communicating with people with profound and multiple learning disabilities" by Phoebe Caldwell, Pavilion Publishers.

"Intensive Interaction" Dave Hewett 2006