

Early Years Team

Intensive interaction/mirroring strategy

What is it?

Intensive interaction/mirroring is a strategy used to develop an awareness of others and aid communication. It allows the child to lead the interaction with no sense of task or objective. The process starts slowly with the adult imitating the child's actions and vocalisations, and the child learning to tolerate sharing personal space with another person. In this way, the child is under no pressure and the pauses are as important to mirror as the movements or vocalisations.

The aim is that the child is able to rehearse:

Engaging with another person
Eye contact
Turn taking
Anticipation
Non-verbal cues
Watching
Vocalising



Intensive interaction/mirroring takes time for both the adult and child to learn. An adult may feel self-conscious copying some of the child's actions and sounds. Make sure the other adults around you understand what you are doing and why. Some children engage with intensive interaction/mirroring immediately, others may take a long time. Don't give up the relationship you will develop with the child. It is worth persevering.

It may be helpful to watch some videos of others using intensive interaction/mirroring to help you in your practice.

How do I do it?

Intensive interaction/mirroring can happen anywhere and at any time. However, when you first start this approach, it may be best to work with the child in a quiet area with a limited set of toys (it is best to have two of each toy). Ensure the child is happy and comfortable with your presence. Observe what the child is choosing to play with and how they are playing.

All children are different - some like a quiet calm environment and need you to be quiet and further away while you mirror their actions. Others like play to be more boisterous and loud. You need to mirror their energy as well as their actions. Mirror the child's actions and sounds in order to give them control of the interaction. If the child uses a toy, then you choose the same one and mirror their actions and vocalisations. However, they may choose to play more physically i.e. running up and down. It is okay to mirror this behaviour too.

For some children, you may mirror them at the same time as they do the action. Some may like you to do it. As soon as they stop, the adult needs to experiment with what helps the child engage and notice your mirroring. Look for indications that they are aware of what you are doing. They may look towards you, they may pause to show anticipation that you are going to copy them, or they may begin changing their actions to see if you will copy them.

Be led by the child by how long the intensive interaction/mirroring lasts. Some children may engage for only seconds before wanting to move away from you. Others will stay engaged for much longer. Over time, you can gradually build up time and levels of engagement. Little and often is better.

What next?

To develop and extend intensive interaction/mirroring, the adult can start to pause during intensive interaction/mirroring to wait for eye contact/glance/gesture to give the child the opportunity to show they want more.

Once interactions are established, the adult can change the action slightly when intensive interaction/mirroring to see if the child notices. This may lead onto the child copying the adult's action.

Another way to extend intensive interaction/mirroring is to see if the child can take turns, making sounds or doing actions with you. You don't ask the child to take turns you simply delay your intensive interaction/mirroring until the child has done the action and note if they begin to wait for you to do it. Initially, this needs to be very short actions or vocalisations.

Links

The link/clip below shows Dave Hewett being interviewed* on the basics of Intensive Interaction <https://youtu.be/rjKxu6QKjAo>

The link/clip below shows Phoebe Cordwell demonstrating* Intensive Interaction <https://youtu.be/7k-1FwTBtlc>

Intensive Interaction is something that a lot of you will be doing with your children and not even realise. [Intensive Interaction](#)

* Please note that although the video clip mentions Autism, Intensive Interaction is a very useful technique for children who have Social Communications Difficulties.