 **INTENSIVE INTERACTION**

**Introduction**

Intensive interaction or joint attention offers a way to connect and communicate with children who struggle with sociability or communication. This can be by commenting on their actions, joining in with them, playfully imitating them. By responding instead of leading we don't make demands on the person that they cannot cope with. Instead we communicate that we value them and enjoy being with them. We allow them to chance to explore with making things happen and to take the lead. The 'topic of conversation' is within their realm of interest

**How to get started**

Spend some time observing the child. How do they talk to themselves? What noises do they make? What movements, or behaviours do they repeat frequently? Tune into them.

Take the child’s lead - respond to things they do. This can be by commenting on their actions, joining in with them, playfully imitating them. By responding instead of leading we don't make demands on the person that they cannot cope with. Instead we communicate that we value them and enjoy being with them. We allow them to chance to explore with making things happen and to take the lead. The 'topic of conversation' is within their realm of interest.

Use timing and rhythm in the interactions. This can make them like games - with anticipation and drama to hold the child's attention. Rhythm and repetition help the child to predict what will happen next and to get more involved. We can create the feeling of taking turns.

**Intensive Interaction Techniques**

* **Sharing Personal Space:** It can be pleasant merely to have someone near, experiencing mutual warmth and proximity e.g. lying/sitting/standing together quietly or otherwise.
* **Vocal Echoing:** Echoing vocalisations can develop conversation like sequences, with child and adult giving and receiving important feedback e.g. echoing of verbal or non-verbal vocalisations.
* **Behavioural Mirroring:** Mirroring a child’s behaviour can develop into action sequences that involve both child and adult.
* **Eye Contact:** Eye contact is an important means for giving and receiving inclusive social signals e.g. making dramatic glances, looking in the mirror, staring at each other. If this is difficult for the child do not pursue.
* **Joint Focus Activity:** with adult and child focusing their attention on the same activity or object, structuring their engagement around that activity.
* **Exchanging facial expressions:** Using facial expressions with communicative intent and creating opportunities for these to be reciprocated in the same way, e.g. smiles, winks, pulling faces, tongue poking.

Have fun. Intensive Interaction sessions should be enjoyable and often playful.