# Sharing attention and Interaction

**What is interaction and why is interaction important?**

- Interaction is one of the foundation building blocks for language development.

- Interaction skills develop from a very young age as most babies will make eye contact with their care givers. They will also engage in simple turn taking activities e.g. making noises in response to a care giver. These are some of the early examples of interaction.

- Children do not need to have language to share experiences and interact with others. For example, when a child looks from an object or activity to a person, this is an interaction.

- Interaction includes being able to show an interest in and an awareness of others and being able to use both verbal (spoken words) and non- verbal means (pointing, gesture, signing, facial expression) to communicate.

- Children learn language and social rules by copying what they see and hear.

- Interaction is important because, through interactions, we build relationships with the people we come into contact with.

## Strategies and activities to support interaction and attention skills

The next few pages outline a number of strategies and activities that will support a child's attention and interaction skills:
- Sensory play
- Intensive interaction
- Bucket Time
- Now and next boards

# Sensory play

**What is it?**

Sensory play involves activities that stimulate children's senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste or touch.

**Who is it for?**

Children who are still exploring their environment and have not yet developed any other play skills (or have limited other play skills).

**What are the benefits?**

- Capture your child's attention and interest in interacting with you
- It provides opportunities for you to interact and explore with your child and make playing with you irresistible by:
    - Getting face to face
    - Watching the child's reactions, how they make choices/request 'more'
    - Waiting
    - Listening

**How do we do it?**

Introduce different objects, noises, smells and textures to your child, using mainly natural or every day items e.g. wood, metal, materials

# Intensive interaction

**What is it?**
Intensive Interaction is a strategy used to develop the early concepts of communication and interaction. These early concepts include such things as enjoying interaction with others, making eye contact and turn taking among others.

**Who is it for?**
Intensive Interaction is designed specifically for children who are at the very early stages of communication (i.e. pre-speech/pre-intentionality). Intensive Interaction can also be used with verbal children, particularly those that need to learn the social skills involved in communication such as eye contact, shared enjoyment, turn taking.

**What are the benefits?**
- The idea is to communicate that the child is valued and their company is enjoyed and also to support them to further develop their ability to engage in interaction with others (e.g. by looking, smiling and vocalizing).
- It enables children with communication needs to engage with their surroundings and build meaningful relationships.
- It supports the child to develop skills in taking turns, eye contact, understanding cause + effect, attention, exploration and using facial expressions

**How do we do it?**
- Intensive Interaction is very simple to carry out.
- No specialised equipment is needed, just an adult who is able to dedicate 1-to-1 time (in short bursts – this does not have to be a long activity).
- When first starting out, the adult should be familiar to the child. The chosen adult should then spend time with the child and mirror (copy) all of their movements/behaviours/interactions/ vocalisations. Even if you think the behaviour was unintentional – mirror it. By mirroring back what the child does, we show them that what they do has an effect on someone else.
- If behaviours are inappropriate, do not feel the need to mirror these.
- This way of mirroring helps children feel more comfortable around adults as they are better able to predict what adults are going to do next.

Please Note: When you first start carrying out Intensive Interaction, the child may ignore you initially – don't be discouraged, it may take a while for the child to tune in to what you are doing.

**The role of the adult:**
- provides a safe environment
- allows the student to control/lead the interaction through the **adult copying their behaviours**
- uses exaggerated noises and facial expressions
- use simple and repetitive language to describe what the child can see or hear
- respond to every behaviour e.g. to a sound, sigh, smile, movement through 'imitating' or 'copying'

**Further information**
For more information please visit http://www.intensiveinteraction.org/

Follow these video links for more information:
- Explanation & Introduction to intensive interaction (Barnsley Speech and Language Therapy)
- Intensive interaction (NHS Ayrshire & Arran)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ec08iPWSth8

# Bucket Time

**What is it?**
Bucket time is part of the Attention Autism approach created by Gina Davies, with the aim of developing children's shared attention skills in a group setting.

**Who is it for?**
Children who need support with developing shared attention (both with and without social communication needs).

**What are the benefits?**
- The adult shares an enjoyable shared experience with the child
- Builds the child's attention and listening
- Encourages the child to make eye contact
- Encourages the child to use simple words
- Supports the child to understand that sometimes the adult is in control
- Develops turn taking skills

**How do we do it?**
- Place 4 <u>very</u> exciting toys into a bucket, bin or box that is not see through and has a lid. It is very important that the items in your bucket are really motivating for the children. For example: flashing toys, windup toys, spinning tops, koosh balls, noisy toys, pop up toys etc
- Sit the children in a semi-circle on mats or stools, you may need extra adults to support them with their sitting.
- Sing a hello song to open the group, for example *"Hello ….., Hello ….., Hello ….. and how are you today?"*
- Sing the bucket time song whilst tapping on the lid of the bucket:
  *"I've got something in my bucket, in my bucket, in my bucket...*
  *I've got something in my bucket...I wonder what it is!?"*
- Pull one item from the bucket and demonstrate it to the group of children. The children are not allowed to touch the toy but should be encouraged to look.
- Place the item back into the bucket saying "the *koosh ball* has finished"
- Sing the bucket song again and pull the next highly motivating item out, do this 3-4 times and after the last item you can say "bucket time has finished, bye bye bucket"
- Sing a goodbye song at the end of the session

**Top Tips**

- Use the same area and seating arrangement
- Run the sessions regularly at a consistent time of day, ideally every day
- Choose an area with as few distractions as possible
- Show the bucket  / or a picture / symbol to the children and lead them firmly but calmly to the area you have chosen
- Use a visual timetable/whiteboard to mark the key elements of the session (eg hello/bucket/goodbye) and clearly mark the end of one activity and the beginning of the next
- Sell it! You're on stage! Enthusiasm and excitement are catching
- Ensure that you know how to use all the toys and that they are in working order
- It's really important that the children in your group *don't touch the items in your bucket*. This way they will learn that bucket time is about looking
- Move onto the next activity before the children lose interest
- Reduce your language.  Use only key words and short phrases e.g. "spinning" "ready steady go"
- Gradually build up the length of the session depending on the children's attention
- It is really important that the bucket time toys are only accessible at this time and that they are not available for children during free play
- Change the toys regularly so they don't lose their novelty, you could rotate and use the same ones again at a later date.


**Further information**


See this video for further information [Video from Bryony Rust - The Bucket approach](#)

# Now and Next board

**What is it?**

A visual support resource that can help children understand their routine.

**Who is it for?**

Children who have difficulty understanding their routine, find moving between activities hard, or have trouble staying on one task.

**What are the benefits?**

- It supports children who find it difficult to play with specific toys/activities, e.g. messy play

- It supports children who find it difficult to move onto another toy/activity

- It supports children who tend to flit from activity to activity - these children will need adult support to focus or some type of timer.

**How do we use it?**

- A board which has the words 'now' on the left hand side and 'next' on the right hand side.

- Underneath both words is a space to attach a picture. The board is laminated and then a piece of Velcro/blu-tac is stuck onto each space.

- Decide what toy/activity you would like the child to play with. Put a picture of that toy/activity on the 'now' side.
  (If the child is not at the stage of recognising pictures, place the toy on the 'now' side, instead of a picture of the toy)

- Put a picture of a toy/activity which the child really enjoys onto the right hand 'next' side. This should motivate the child to complete the 'now' activity.

- Take the board to the child and say "come 'now'....... (eg. 'cars') 'next' .......(eg. 'painting')" pointing to and labelling the pictures as you talk.

- Take the board to the 'now' toy/activity and support the child as necessary.

- When the child has finished playing show the board again. Say 'next'....... and take the child to the next toy/activity.

- Initially you may want to keep the 'now' activity fairly short and quickly follow it by the 'next' activity, then gradually increase the amount of time the child is at the 'now' or non-preferred activity.

**Further information**

- See this video for a visual demonstration of using a now-next board with toys and pictures: https://youtu.be/H2kAziI-c-Q