



Issue no. 9

SEND Newsletter

Your termly newsletter about our school!

Happy Half Term

We would like to wish everyone a very restful half-term and look forward to seeing you all on the 24th Feb

A piece of Inspiration

“Every child is a different kind of flower, and all together, they make this world a beautiful garden.”



In this term's newsletter

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Dates for the diary

- Half term 17th Feb - 21st Feb
- Back to School 24th Feb
- Easter Half Term 7th April - 21st April
- Back to School 22nd April

Local Activities

GRAVITY

LUTON

Gravity SEN Session! A 60 minute whole park session. The lights come up and the sounds go down at their relaxed SEN sessions when the whole Gravity park is open exclusively for members of recognised disabled groups.

£6.95 per child

Use code COMPCARER at the checkout for 1 x free carer with every SEN session.

<https://gravityglobal.com/active/luton/activities/sen-sessions>

Contact our SEND team

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Helping Children with SEND Build Relationships

Children with SEND may face barriers that make forming friendships difficult. Here are some top tips on supporting them to build relationships.

Building relationships are a key part of our lives. These moments shape us into who we are today and create unforgettable memories.

However, throughout our lives, we have all sometimes felt uncomfortable in social situations.

Those who have conditions or special educational needs that may make socialising more difficult may need some extra support in developing positive meaningful relationships with their peers.

Those with such conditions can sometimes face disadvantages in many areas of society. Mencap reports that over 50% of people with disabilities feel lonely, with this number rising to 77% for 18-34-year-olds. This can have a negative impact on our quality of life, as well as mental health.

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Focus on your child's peers, not them!

Being able to build emotional connections with others can sometimes prove a struggle. The desire to converse doesn't always come naturally, so finding things in common can be a way to help children to take the first steps in developing a new friendship.

Use imagination to bring a story to life!

Communication, especially verbal communication, can be difficult for children with SEND. So, why not look to communicate in a multi-sensory way?

Storytime is key!

It is natural to feel reluctant to engage in a conversation when stressed and anxious. Sadly, City, University of London found that 40% of autistic children, adolescents and adults suffer from one or more forms of anxiety. Of these, social anxiety was a common trait. As a result, conversing becomes even more of a challenge. Stories are a wonderful form of play, and when we share a story with someone we automatically feel connected to them. Sensory stories combine concise text and engaging sensory experience, meaning you can access the story through language, sensation, or both. Children who can use language enjoy the fun of having sensory experiences as a part of the story sharing experience, and for children who do not use language, the sensations give them access to the fun of the story.

Promote other forms of communication, not just verbal!

Expressing yourself doesn't only come verbally. Body language, in particular, is a proven method of conveying information to your peers and is non-verbal. Additionally, it is an unconscious action, so it doesn't need as much thought as words coming out of your mouth. Useful tools can be Makaton and communication boards. (An example of a communication board will be available on the next page)

It's their conversation, let them go at their own pace!

The most important thing to consider is that children with SEND may think differently to neurotypical children. Therefore, typical methods to encourage inclusion and conversation might not be as effective.

Cut out the noise, and work with your child. They're their own person!

Naturally, seeing your children struggle socially can be frustrating. Whilst we all want the best for our children, it's key to note that each child is their own person. Our unique set of traits, quirks and features make us human!

- Have a Low Stimulation Environment - it can prove a sense of security and comfort
- Visuals - use picture cards and/or social stories to give children ample time to process the situation placed in front of them, reducing anxiety.
- Parallel Play - allow children to play alongside, without the need for communication. Exposure first, communication second.
- Shared Interests - discuss common interests with other children's parents. That way, you can best equip your child for an upcoming social encounter during play.
- Encouraging Co-operation - using childhood favourites such as building blocks teaches teamwork, trust, patience and success at an early age.
- Social skill building - your mirror is your best friend! Practice facial emotion recognition and conversation starters at home. Then, your child can take that with them and converse at their own pace.

Free resources available

Intensive Interaction

What is Intensive Interaction?

Intensive Interaction is an approach to helping children who are in the early stages of developing communication and social skills. The approach is based on the way we observe and respond to the actions and noises of babies, and interpret these as communication. It helps a person and their communication partner to connect and enjoy each other's company more. It's about watching closely how a child responds to different situations through their body language, voice and facial expressions - and responding to this.

Intensive Interaction is two-way communication and can be used at all times in all environments.

Who is Intensive Interaction for?

Intensive Interaction can be useful for children with:

- Severe and complex learning difficulties/Very severe learning difficulties.
- Profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Multi-sensory impairments.
- A diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder.
- A range of self-stimulatory or socially isolating behaviours.
- Behaviour that challenges.

How does Intensive Interaction work?

Whether you are a health or social care professional, parent, family member or friend, it's important to understand the principles of Intensive Interaction:

- Focus on the person you're supporting and put aside any thoughts or preconceived ideas of your own.
- Adjust your own approaches/behaviour/voice to appear less threatening.
- Observe what their body language is telling you.
- Treat everything the person you're supporting does as if it's communication.
- Use timing and rhythm in the interactions, which can lead to games, anticipation and turn-taking.
- Rather than always mimicking exactly, use slight variations and have fun!

Have a go and don't worry about getting it wrong. Use whatever combination of speech, touch, sign or visual language works best.

Intensive Interaction - What do I do?

Imitation

Copy what your child does by repeating vocalisations, physical behaviour or actions, and respond in a way that is meaningful, recognisable and enjoyable for your child.

Eye contact and exchanging facial expressions

You can do this by playing games like peek-a-boo, pulling faces, or looking in the mirror together. You could demonstrate or copy facial expressions like smiles, tongue movements, yawns or sneezes.

Starting to use intensive interaction

Watch, wait and tune in to what your child is doing. See what they're interested in and try to enter their world in terms of physical position and how they're thinking. Follow your child's lead let them show you what to do don't do too much let your child's play, movements and vocalisations guide you respond to what they're doing using body posture, imitation and joining in make your voice, face and body language look exciting and interested in what they are doing

Props and Toys

You don't necessarily need lots of props for intensive interaction as you can use expressions, vocalisations and body movements. However, some equipment that might be useful

includes:

Scarves

Musical instruments

Balls and ball runs

Bubbles

Mirrors

Balloons

Cause and effect toys

Sensory materials like feathers or brushes

Wind-up toys

Slinkies

It's really important to follow your child's lead, so use objects they're interested in.

Joint focus and joint action

Look at and explore objects in the environment together.

Do things together or at the same time.

Examples include:

- Exploring fabrics, photos, toys
- Passing objects or toys back and forth
- Looking in the mirror together
- Listening to sounds and playing with instruments
- Making noises together
- Playing with a ball
- Watching bubbles
- Singing action songs

Building anticipation

Start an activity then leave space for your child to anticipate and react. For example, say "ready, steady... go!" with a long pause in between steady and go for your child to make a physical movement, eye contact or vocalisation.

Ideas for anticipation building games include:

bubbles

tickling

chasing

putting cars down a ramp

throwing your child in the air or helping them to jump peekaboo (by leaving a big gap: "peekaaaa... boo!")

Information:

Sometimes children do not want to share their toys. In this case, try to have matching objects instead of you taking your child's toy to copy them.

For example, try both holding matching cars, pompoms or shakers. Copy unusual behaviours or noises. Your child might do some unusual behaviours or make unusual noises, and you might feel a bit strange copying them. However, it is important to try to copy all of these unless they are unsafe or inappropriate behaviours like running away in a dangerous place, mouthing unsafe toys or drawing on the walls.

Finishing a session

Pause and stop. It's really useful to pause sometimes while you wait and see what your child does next, and don't forget to stop when they've had enough.

Even if it's only been a very short interaction, short and enjoyable play together is much more beneficial than a longer interaction that leaves everyone feeling frustrated.

Communication Boards

What is a Communication Board?

A communication board is a sheet of symbols, pictures or photos that a child will learn to point to, to communicate with those around them.

Why use a communication board? Speech is difficult for some children. They may find it difficult to make people understand what they are trying to say. They might say less than they want to because the words are hard to say. If the child is able to show their listener as well as tell them what they are trying to say they are more likely to get their message across. It can also be used to model to the child how to make choices and how to develop their language further.

Will using a communication board stop a child speaking?

No! A communication board is just another way of supporting communication. It is used as well as speech not instead of it. If speech is easier (or becomes easier) a child will naturally choose to speak rather than point to pictures.

How to use a communication board?

It is important to remember that if this is a new way for your child to communicate, they will need lots of time and support to learn how to use it effectively. Children usually learn language by having adults and those around them, use the language themselves, which the child then learns to copy. It is the same principle with using a communication board. The adult will need to use the board often to give the child the opportunity to copy this.

The following steps will break this down further:

How to model the communication board for your child:

- Choose an activity your child is interested in, for this example we will use puzzles.
- Place the board so both you and the child can see and reach it
- As you start to play, comment on what you and your child are doing, as you do this, point to the key words that you are saying, on the board. For Example: "more puzzle" "it fits!" "do you want a different one?" "it's the same" "turn it" "push it down" Pause each time you model a word or phrase, allowing your child time to copy by also pointing, if they feel ready to.
- If your child points to any of the pictures, it is important to name the picture they pointed to, and then respond appropriately. For example, if your child points to "puzzle" you would say "puzzle" and then maybe hand your child a piece of puzzle, or show them the puzzle. As your child develops, you may start to point to more than one key word at a time. For example, you might say "turn the puzzle" pointing to "turn" and then "puzzle". On a more complex board, you may be able to build longer more complex phrases, for example on the "Talking about my weekend board" you could create sentences such as "I stayed at home, and watched tv, it was boring" "I went to a restaurant with my friends, it was fun"

Free resources available

Example of Communication board

