Top 5 tips for Autism Professionals:

Using Intensive Interaction

In this article Phoebe Caldwell, an expert practitioner in Intensive Interaction provides her top 5 tips on using Intensive Interaction. This article aims to provide an easy read overview of practical tips for professionals, covering the main considerations when using Intensive Interaction.

A brief introduction to Intensive Interaction from Phoebe Caldwell:

Intensive Interaction uses body language to tune into children with whom we find it difficult to communicate. It involves ‘learning their language’ and responding, not just to ‘what’ they do but ‘how they do it, since this will tell us how they are feeling. It is more than just copying or mimicking, it means entering their world and working from what it is that their brain finds meaningful.

Intensive Interaction is now being used successfully around the world to establish emotional engagement. It is particularly useful when used together with (1) a reduction in signals that overload the brain and (2) an increase in proprioceptive signals (messages from joints and muscles to the brain, telling it what the body is doing), as part of an approach to provide and autism-friendly environment

Top 5 Tips

Using Intensive Interaction (engaging attention through the use of body language)

1. Empty yourself of your own agenda and enter your partner’s world.
2. Look for what your partner’s body language is telling you has meaning for them, the physical feedback they are giving themselves, not just at what they are doing - but how they are doing it, since this will tell you how they are feeling. Watch the whole body rather than just the face.
3. Tune in to your partner with empathy. using their ‘language’, with the aim of building up a ‘conversation’ and emotional engagement. Give them time to respond.
4. Rather than mimicking and imitating your partner exactly, think of your answer as a response, delivered within their repertoire but with very slight variations to attract their attention.
5. Look out for negative responses (such as a flinch to light touch), which will indicate Hyper or Hyposensitivities. Where possible address these.

These top 5 tips are meant only as a general guide to what to think about when using Intensive interaction.

You can find further information on Intensive Interaction from Phoebe Caldwell's website:

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Suggested further reading:
Jessica Kingsley Publishers
Caldwell P. ‘The Anger Box’ (In process of publication) Pavilion Publishers
Films:
Caldwell P. ‘Learning the Language’ Pavilion Publishers
Caldwell P. ‘Autism and Intensive Interaction’ Jessica Kingsley Publishers