

STRENGTHENING ATTACHMENT THROUGH ATTUNED INTERACTION:

Video Interaction Guidance for Caregivers and Children with Social Communication Needs or Differences

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Attachment theory emphasises the central role of sensitive, attuned caregiving for children's emotional regulation, security, and development (Santana-Ferrández et al., 2025). For children with social communication needs or differences, caregiver-child interactions may diverge from neurotypical patterns (West et al., 2026), potentially complicating pathways to secure attachment and mutual understanding. However, attachment-informed interventions remain under-researched in this population, particularly at the level of observable interactional change (Tsappis et al., 2022). There is also limited research on how to identify and code observable attunement patterns in neurodiverse parent-child interactions.

This study **a)** explored **how interaction patterns change before and after VIG**, and **b)** **co-developed and piloted an observational framework** with an **advisory group of caregivers, practitioners, and people with lived experience**, designed to **capture diverse expressions of attunement**.

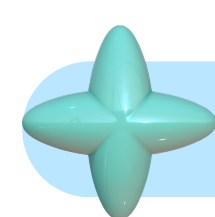
VIDEO INTERACTION GUIDANCE (VIG)

A brief, strengths-based **parenting intervention** recommended by NICE. VIG uses a **video-feedback** method where parents and practitioners reflect upon video-recordings of parents' interaction with their children to identify moments of attunement.

VIG **builds upon successful communication patterns**, and enhances parents' **understanding of the child's mental states**.



Practitioners use the '*Principles of Attuned Interaction and Guidance*' framework to identify behaviours associated with attunement and reciprocity.



METHOD

Participants

- 6 parent-child pairs who recently completed VIG. Children all had an identified social communication need or difference.
- Parents (83.3% female) were aged 29-48 (M = 39.17); children (50% female) were aged 3-9 (M = 5.7).
- Referred for VIG through different services, e.g., educational psychology, CAMHS, social services.

Procedure

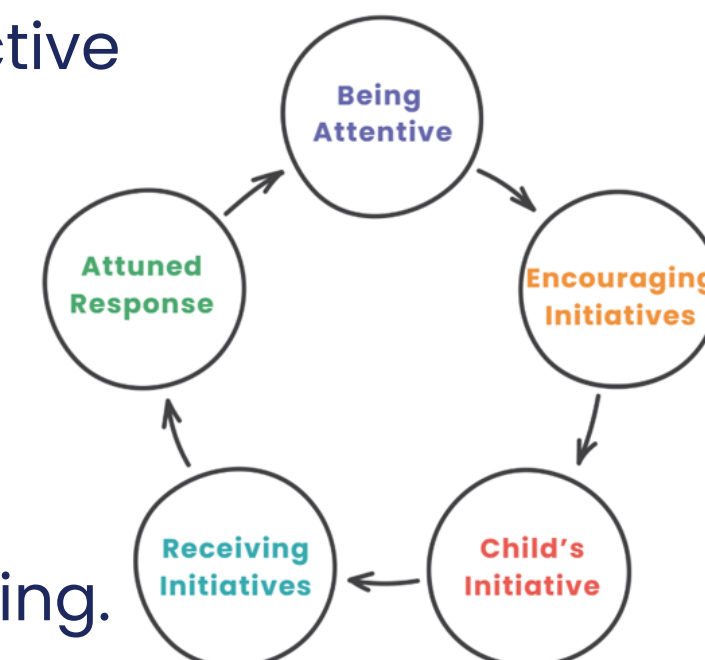
- Pairs consented for the first and last video-recordings taken as a part of the intervention, to be analysed.

Analysis

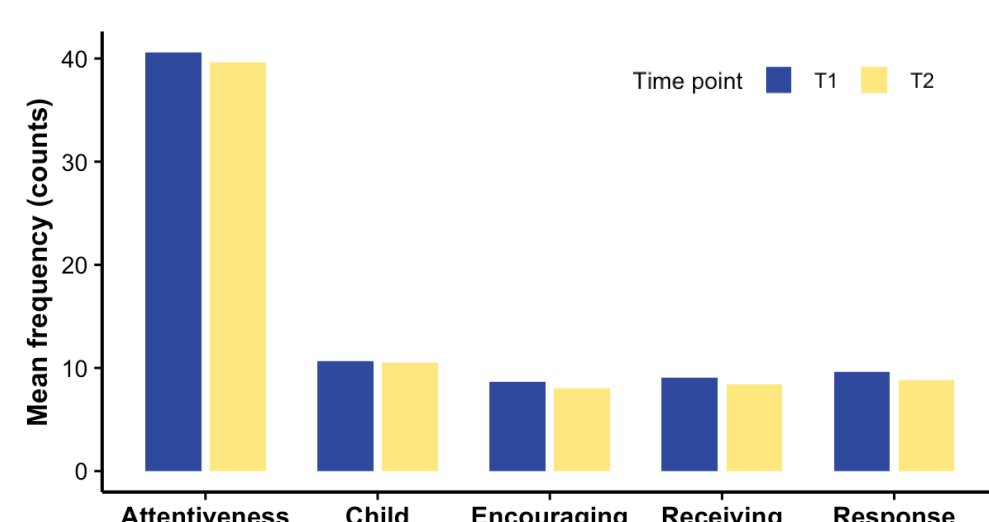
- Videos were coded with **Mangold Interact software** using the newly developed framework: '**DACS**'.

DYADIC ATTUNEMENT CODING SYSTEM (DACS)

- Based on the *Principles of Attuned Interaction and Guidance* (Kennedy, 2011), informed by Trevarthen's (1980) theories of intersubjectivity and Beiman's Contact Principles (1990).
- A **public and practitioner advisory group** informed the refinement of the PAIG into an objective behavioural coding scheme.
- The DACS describes a cycle of communication between a parent and child. Each category contains sub-categories that include observable behaviours ready for observational coding.



RESULTS



No changes in mean behavioural frequencies were observed between T1 and T2 (4 pairs analysed). However, **pairs showed distinct interactional patterns**:

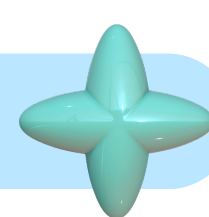
1 Parent appeared **calmer and more confident** at time 2.

2 Parent was significantly **less intrusive** at time 2 and the child appeared more settled.

3 Child made more **active and confident initiatives** at time 2.

4 An **unfamiliar activity** at time 2 appeared to impact the interaction.

CONCLUSION



- The study offers a **novel, attachment-informed framework** to measure caregiver-child interaction where connection unfolds through non-traditional interactional pathways.
- Although the DACS **successfully quantified** interactional behaviours, behavioural frequencies alone did **not fully capture the richness** and quality of parent-child interactions.
- Qualitative differences in attunement and interaction were evident within the videos but were not consistently reflected in quantitative scores: the DACS should be **used alongside qualitative or contextual analysis**.
- Contextual factors may have influenced scores**, including use of videos from VIG intervention cycles, the clip sampling strategy, and the absence of information regarding families' reasons for referral or intervention goals.

NEXT STEPS

- Refine and validate the DACS coding framework.
- Integrate DACS with Motion Energy Analysis (MEA) to explore changes in relational synchrony and interactional dynamics.
- Complete analysis of the remaining dataset (currently based on 4 dyads; 2 follow-up videos pending).

