



Interoception: internal body sense

Your local healthcare provider

What is Interoception?

Humans have 8 sensory systems. Our visual, touch, hearing, taste and smell systems, which detect external information and our proprioceptive (body awareness), vestibular (balance) and interoceptive systems, which detect internal body signals.

Interoception enables us to notice body signals (such as heartrate, a full bladder and tense muscles) to give our brain clues about the emotions we are feeling. It enables us to take action to give our body what it needs. For example:

'my bladder feels full' ➡ 'I must need to empty it' ➡ 'I will go to the toilet'

'my tummy is making loud noises and feels empty' ➡ 'I'm hungry' ➡ 'I need to eat some food'

'my heart is racing fast and I have a bubbly feeling in my tummy' ➡ 'I feel nervous' ➡ 'I need to leave'

Differences in Interoception:

Can lead to difficulty in understanding how we feel and impact in many different ways.

Common signs include:

- Toileting training difficulties

- Not recognising when hungry/thirsty/full

- Not feeling tired

- Over or under responsive to pain

- Difficulty identifying emotions in self and others

- Not recognising signs of a build up of distress, leading to 'melt downs'

- Pinpointing signs of illness





Strategies to support development of

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‘Interoception talk’ – label the way your body parts feel during various activities with your child, e.g. ‘my heart beats faster after I have run up the stairs’, ‘my hand feels warm when you hold it’, ‘my eyes feel heavy, I must be tired’.

‘Interoception attention’ - Encourage your child to notice how they feel during various activities, e.g. ‘how does your heart feel, is it beating fast?’ (you could compare sitting on the sofa, to after running around in the garden), or ‘I can see you wriggling on the spot and pulling a face, does your bladder feel full or empty, do you need the toilet?’, or ‘you have goose bumps on your arms, are you cold? do you need a jumper?’

Adaptive Strategies:

Try setting times for tasks that rely on effective interception, such as toileting and eating.

This can be included on visual schedules/diaries and fit with school routines

Vibrating toileting watches - times can be set for school breaks (for recommended brands visit www.eric.org.uk) to subtly remind the child to visit the toilet

Prompt cards or a visual chart detailing appropriate clothing for various weather conditions

References:

www.kelly-mahler.com

Interoception; The Eighth Sensory System, Mahler, k (2017)

