

INTEROCEPTION

What is Interoception?

Interoception is referred to as the eighth sensory system. It is the ability to be aware of sensations inside of the body such as...

Basic Needs

- Hunger/Thirst
- Bowel/Bladder
- Fatigue
- Temperature

Physical Body Signals

- Pain
- Muscle Tension
- Breathing
- Nausea

Emotional Signals

- Anxiety
- Excitement
- Anger
- Calm

Interoception can play a large role in understanding our emotional awareness, self-regulation, and overall executive functioning.

(Bishop et al., 2023)

Adequate interoceptive awareness helps your child to recognize..

- When they are hungry or thirsty.
- When they are need to use the bathroom.
- When they are tired and need rest.

With low interoceptive awareness your child might not recognize...

- When they are hungry until they are starving.
- Early signals of becoming overwhelmed.
- That they need to use the bathroom until they have an accident.

How can you help your child?

Basic Needs

Hunger

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Refusal to eat because they “don’t feel hungry.”
 - Overeating due to not recognizing fullness.
- *Goal:* To improve hunger and thirst awareness
- *How to help:*
 - Use of visual hunger/fullness scale
 - Body check ins before and after meals
 - Is your stomach growling
 - Does your energy feel low
 - Is your stomach empty or full?

Thirst

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Only drinks when prompted.
 - Does not ask for a drink until exhibiting signs of dehydration.
- *Goal:* To improve thirst awareness
- *How to help:*
 - Practice early recognition of signs of thirst (mouth dry, headache)
 - Incorporate a schedule with reminders to drink water



Temperature

- *Signs and Symptoms*
 - Dresses inappropriately for the weather
- *Goal:* Recognize signs of being too hot or too cold
- *How to help:*
 - Identify signs of overheating (dizziness, sweating, flushed face) and of being cold (shivering, teeth chattering, pale fingers).
 - Pair body sensations with appropriate reactions (removing or adding a layer of clothes, going inside, drinking water)
 - Discuss different weather conditions and what the appropriate clothing choices can be.

Fatigue

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Frequently says they are “not tired” thought physical signs are present.
 - Experiences meltdowns before recognizing fatigue.
- *Goal:* Recognize the signs of fatigue before exhaustion.
- *How to help:*
 - Teach the body signals associated with fatigue (heavy eyelids, yawning)
 - Discuss how the body and mind feel before and after sleep
 - Create regular and predictable sleep schedules



Toileting

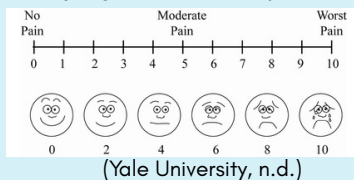
- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Accidents despite age appropriate toilet skills
 - Requires frequent reminders to use the toilet
 - Difficulty identifying abdominal pressure or discomfort
- *Goal:* Improve awareness of bladder and bowel sensations
- *How to help:*
 - Implement scheduled toileting sessions to prevent accidents and gradually increase time between sessions as awareness improves.
 - Teach recognition of signs of bowel/bladder sensations (pressure, fullness) using a diagram to show where these sensations are felt.
 - Encourage discussion of body sensations before and after using elimination.

How can you help your child?

Physical Body Sensations

Pain

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Does not notice cuts, bruises
 - Continues playing despite injury
 - Inability to convey where pain is located
 - Strong emotional response to cuts, bruises
- *Goal:* Ability to identify, locate and communicate pain.
- *How to help:*
 - Use of visual analog scale for pain.
 - Use a body map to locate pain.
 - Teach pain identifying words (sharp, burning, aching, sore)



Muscle Tension

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Inability to grade force during activities (writing, squeezing, slamming)
 - Frequent clenching of fists/jaw/shoulders subconsciously
- *Goal:* Ability to identify how much force the body's muscles are exerting.
- *How to help:*
 - Yoga/stretching while comparing sensation of tight/relaxed muscles
 - Activities that require force grading (clothespins, coloring, balloon volleyball)

Physiological Arousal

- *Signs and Symptoms*
 - Unaware of heart rate increasing during excitement or anxiety.
 - Does not realize they need to slow down and take a break from movement.
 - Meltdowns occur "out of nowhere"
- *Goal:* Ability to identify changes in breathing and heart rate (arousal level)
- *How to help:*
 - Ask child to feel their heartbeat before and after movement.
 - Practice diaphragmatic breathing.
 - Teach regulation strategies in response to physiological signs (when my heart is beating fast, I can try taking a big breath).

Illness

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Struggles to explain what feels wrong when sick.
 - Fails to report feeling sick.
- *Goal:* Ability to recognize and identify the feeling of being sick and uncomfortable.
- *How to help:*
 - Use of body maps to locate discomfort.
 - Teach vocabulary related to common illness and discomfort (ache, sore, dizzy, nauseous)



How can you help your child?- Emotions

Emotions

- *Signs and symptoms:*
 - Saying "I don't know" in response to being asked what is wrong when visibly upset.
 - Experiencing sudden emotional outburst with no warning signs.
- *Goal:* Help your child realize the body sensations connected to emotions.
- *How to help:*
 - Practice recognition of early emotions signs before escalation based on body signals to promote body-emotion connection.
 - Emotion thermometers or scales.

Anxiety

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Butterflies in stomach
 - Sweaty palms
 - Racing heart
 - Tight chest



Excitement

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Fast heart beat
 - Full of energy
 - Smiling
 - Jumping



Sadness

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Heavy body
 - Tired
 - Lump in throat



Fear

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Sweating
 - Shaky
 - Frozen muscles
 - Frozen muscles



Anger

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Face hot
 - Tense shoulders
 - Clenched fists



Calm

- *Body sensations signaling this emotion:*
 - Relaxed muscles
 - Calm breathing
 - Warmth
 - Light feeling



References

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Watch a video explaining more detail about this topic on
YouTube!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmQNc2_QgpY

