

In addition to the five senses, we have interoception—the sense that helps us recognize internal signals like hunger, thirst, temperature, pain, and emotions. Often overlooked, interoception is crucial for self-awareness and regulation. Many neurodivergent children struggle with this, making it harder to identify feelings, respond to physical needs, and manage emotions.

## Some things to look for

A child struggling with interoception might:

- Have trouble identifying when they're feeling hungry, thirsty, or tired.
- Not recognize when they need to use the bathroom until it's urgent.
- Be unaware of their physical discomfort (e.g., itchy skin, muscle tension).
- Struggle to detect changes in body temperature (feeling hot or cold) or outside temperatures (e.g., wears T-shirt in winter or sweatshirts in the summer time).
- Have difficulty recognizing when they're feeling anxious or upset.
- Not being able to tell the difference between nervous excitement and fear.
- Have trouble distinguishing between physical pain and emotional distress.
- Struggle with understanding when they need a break or rest.
- Find it difficult to express or verbalize what they are feeling physically or emotionally.
- Miss early signs of being overstimulated or overwhelmed (e.g., heart racing, shallow breathing).

## Misinterpreting Interoceptive Cues

Many children that struggle with Interoception will incorrectly identify what they are feeling as feeling sick. For example, if they are feeling a sensation in their tummy, they will identify this as being sick, rather than feeling anxious or hungry, or having to use the washroom.



## The Five Stages of Interoceptive Awareness

1. Sensation Recognition – Children begin to notice body sensations (e.g., hunger, thirst) but may not understand what they mean.
2. Sensation Labeling – They start identifying and naming sensations but may struggle with more subtle cues like nervousness.
3. Recognizing Emotional Cues – They link physical sensations to emotions, helping with emotional awareness and regulation.
4. Interoceptive Self-Regulation – They learn to manage their emotions and physical states using strategies like deep breathing.
5. Integrating Body & Emotional Awareness – They fully integrate interoception into self-regulation, making informed choices based on internal cues.

## How to Support

### Body Awareness Activities

- Use body scans
- Deep pressure input (e.g., climbing, stretching, weighted items) to improve body awareness.

### Connecting Sensations to Emotions

- Encourage interoception journals
- Emotion charades
- Mindful breathing to help kids recognize how emotions feel in their bodies.

### Recognizing Physical Needs

- Teach kids to use a hunger scale
- Check their heart rate
- Notice bathroom cues through modeling and descriptive language.

### Use 'Interoception Talk':

- Label the way your various body parts feel during daily activities ( E.g: "My hands feel warm when you hold it ; My breathing feels fast when I run with you".)

## Important to Note

*Interoception First,  
Emotional Regulation  
Second!*

Implementing emotional regulation strategies like "practice deep breathing when you are feeling anxious" may not work because they aren't able to recognize that they are anxious to begin with!