

Toronto District School Board Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services from the Special Education and Inclusion Department

Interoception

Interoception is the hidden internal sense that allows us to “feel” our internal organs and skin and gives us information regarding our internal state or condition.

It helps us feel many important sensations, such as pain, body temperature, hunger, thirst, heart rate, breathing rates, sleepiness and when to use the bathroom.

The ‘Eighth’ Sensory System helps children understand their internal body cues for:

- Hunger/satiation.
- Thirst.
- Pain.
- Body Temperature.
- Heart/Breath Rate.
- Social Touch.
- Muscle Tension.
- Nausea.
- Sleepiness/Fatigue.
- Physical Exertion.

- Need for the washroom.

Interoception signals alert children that their internal systems are out of balance and motivates them to take action to do something to restore the internal balance. Children's ability to register their internal body states impacts their ability to self-regulate.

Interoception Drives Self-Regulation Behaviours:

Children who struggle to recognize internal body cues might have difficulty knowing when they become:

- Angry.
- Anxious.
- Injured.
- Hungry/Thirsty.
- Ill.
- Need to use the washroom.
- When they are hot/cold.

Classroom Strategies to Promote Interoception:

- Alerting exercises.
- Mindfulness.
- Emotion matching games.
- Breathing Exercises.
- Snack/Water breaks.
- Visual cues/prompts.
- Find your 'pulse'.
- Head to Toe Muscle Relaxation.
- Explore temperature games.
- 'How do I feel' activities.

Reference:

Mahler, Kelly. Interoception 'The Eighth Sensory System: Practical Solutions for Improving Self-Regulation, Self-Awareness and Social Understanding. AAPC Publishing 2017.

Disclaimer: All activities should be completed with adult supervision. It is okay if your child gravitates towards certain activities and avoids others. This is not individualized therefore some activities may not be appropriate for your child.