



WHAT IS INTEROCEPTION?

Interoception

Have you ever noticed that you're hungry because your stomach starts to growl, realized you're nervous because your heart is beating faster, or suddenly noticed that you really need to use the bathroom?

That's interoception at work!

Interoception is our ability to notice and understand signals coming from inside our bodies. These signals help us recognize things like hunger, thirst, tiredness, pain, temperature, a full bladder, or changes in our heart rate and breathing.

Building Interoception

Adults can help children become more curious about their bodies. Rather than telling a child how they feel, try helping them notice. You might say:

- *"Your hands are squeezed really tight. What do you notice?"*
- *"Your breathing got faster when we started talking about school."*
- *"I wonder what your tummy is telling you right now."*

Simple activities such as stretching, movement, breathing exercises, noticing temperature, or checking in with hunger and fullness can also help children practice paying attention to internal sensations.

Why Does Interoception Matter for Mental Health?

Body signals give us important clues about our emotions. A child might experience a tight chest when they are worried, a hot face when they are embarrassed, or tense muscles when they are becoming frustrated.

Children don't automatically know what these sensations mean. They gradually learn to connect the dots:

"My stomach feels funny → I might be nervous → I need some support."

When children have difficulty noticing or interpreting their body's signals, it can be harder to recognize emotions and respond to their needs before they become overwhelming. A child may seem to go from totally fine to a meltdown very quickly, forget to eat or use the bathroom, or have trouble explaining how they feel.



Interoception is just one piece of development, but helping children understand what their bodies are telling them can provide an important foundation for emotional awareness, self-regulation, and self-advocacy.