

Interoception - Exploring How Emotions Feel Within Our Bodies

WHAT IS INTEROCEPTION?

Interoception is the ability to sense internal signals from your body.

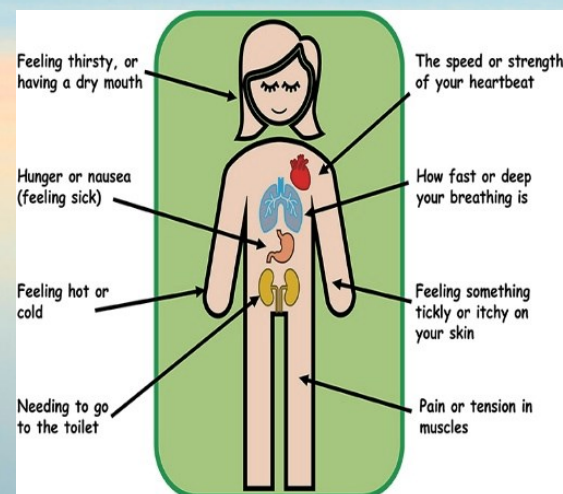
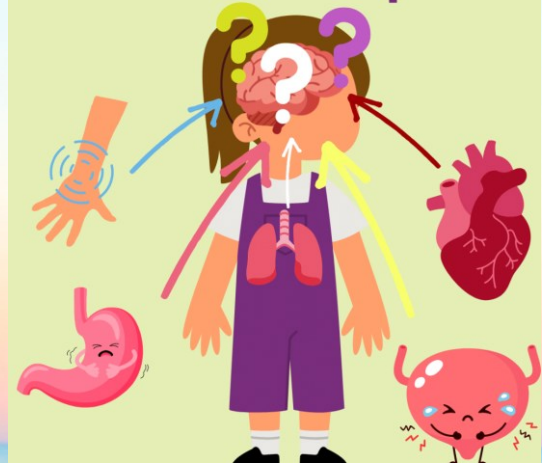
We could describe this as “realising how your body feels”.

For example, this could include noticing when you are hungry or feeling sick, whether your heart is beating faster than usual and whether your muscles are tense or relaxed.

WHY IS INTEROCEPTION IMPORTANT?

- When we experience emotions, they are often accompanied by changes in how our body feels such as the heart beating faster than usual.
- However, this can often mean many different things - a faster heart rate could mean we are scared, excited or just that we have done some exercise.
- The emotion we associate with a certain bodily sensation is often also based on other clues like context.
- For example, if your heart is racing before a public speech, you might be feeling scared but if your heart is racing after seeing your favourite football team win, you might be excited.
- Although we use other clues, it is important we can sense the internal signals too.
- People who have challenges sensing these internal signals can find it difficult to work out what emotion they are actually feeling, as well as having difficulties in recognising emotions in others.

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HOW WE CAN SUPPORT INTEROCEPTIVE AWARENESS

There are a few different ways that increased interoceptive awareness can be supported. Below are a couple of examples:

1) Emotion mapping

- Use a blank body map (like the one below) and ask the person to think about where on the body they feel different emotions (e.g. anxiety, happiness, sadness). It may also help to ask them to try to describe exactly what these feelings are like.
- You could also use a body map for a specific emotion (e.g. anxiety) and write on each part of the body how it feels when experiencing it (e.g. for anxiety, some people may say they feel sick in their stomach).

2) Emotion Charades

- Act out different emotions (e.g. sad, happy, shocked, anxious) and ask the individual to describe how their body might feel if they were experiencing that emotion.
- This could also be done by looking at images of the emotions like the ones below instead of acting them out.

