

INTEROCEPTION

What is this developmental skill?

Interoception is the ability to notice and interpret signals coming from inside the body, including hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, temperature, breathing, and emotional sensations. It helps children recognize what their bodies need and respond appropriately.

How does this normally develop?

Responsive caregiving helps children connect internal sensations with words and actions. Adults notice when babies are hungry, tired, uncomfortable, or upset and consistently respond. Over time, children begin recognizing these internal signals themselves.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

When caregivers are inconsistent or unresponsive, children may not learn to recognize or trust their internal body signals. Chronic stress can also make survival-related signals dominate awareness while everyday bodily needs go unnoticed.

What might this look like?

Children may:

- Not recognize hunger until extremely hungry.
- Ignore thirst.
- Have difficulty identifying emotions.
- Fail to notice pain or illness.
- Seem unaware of needing the bathroom.
- Become dysregulated without recognizing early warning signs.

Parenting Implications

Help children label body sensations throughout the day. Ask questions such as, "What is your body telling you?" or "Do you notice your tummy feels empty?" Model noticing your own body signals and establish predictable routines for meals, hydration, rest, and toileting.

From Understanding to Attunement

Rather than assuming a child is choosing to ignore their body's needs, caregivers can recognize that the child may genuinely have difficulty noticing those internal signals. Consistent support gradually strengthens interoceptive awareness.