

Autism Hub

West Cheshire



Identifying emotions in yourself and others

The autistic experience

- *“Most of my life I feel as if I am outside of what is happening around me. I rarely actually am able to identify the emotional environment of either myself or others”* (Lawson, 2007, p.118)

Discuss



The autistic experience



- *“Where others may show emotions in a specific way in a situation, we are often on a time delay.”*
- *“I might not actually feel anything until later when I think over the conversation”*

(An autistic adult's experience, take from Evans, Lesko and Attwood, 2014).



Processing time is essential!

The role of interoception

What is **INTEROCEPTION?**

Interoception is a sense that allows us to notice internal body signals like a growling stomach, racing heart, tense muscles or full bladder. When we notice these body signals our brain uses them as clues to our emotions.

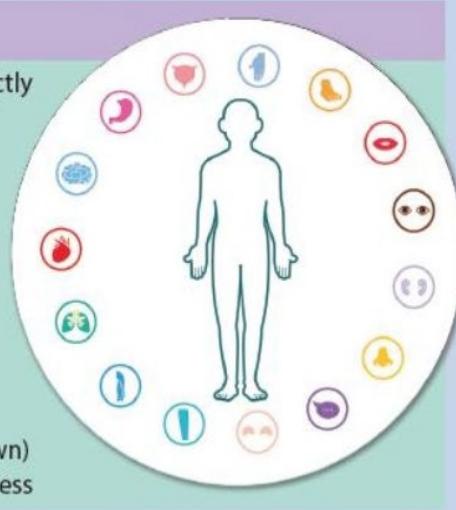
Interoception helps us to feel many important emotions including:

Hunger	Pain	Sleepiness	Anxiety	Calm
Fullness	Illness	Need for Bathroom	Distraction	Boredom
Thirst	Body Temperature	Anger	Focus	Sadness

Differences in Interoception

are very common and can lead to challenges in identifying exactly how one feels. Common signs of interoception differences can include **difficulty** with one or more of the following:

- Recognizing when hungry, full or thirsty
- Toilet training (daytime and/or night time)
- Identifying when sleepy
- Overly sensitive or not sensitive enough to pain
- Pinpointing symptoms of illness
- Identifying emotions in self
- Identifying emotions in others
- Recognizing building signs of distress (before a full meltdown)
- Independently using coping strategies during times of distress



This relates to sensitivity/awareness of our organs inside our body, recognising internal body signals. These signals let you know when you need to eat or drink, go to the toilet, when you are in pain etc. **Our brain uses these signals as clues to our emotions.**

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Interoception and Alexithymia

- If you don't recognise the signals in your body then, then it can be hard to take steps before you become overwhelmed.
- Reduced interoception is like driving a car without a dash- board!
- Alexithymia (identifying and describing emotions) is frequently experienced in autistic individuals (Up to 65%, Berthoz and Hill, 2005) and is associated with reduced interoception.



Navigating emotions

- *“Emotions are abstract, intangible, and difficult to grasp, and people with autism often find it challenging to communicate about such matters...in the past some professionals and others have mistakenly believed that this difficulty and discomfort about feelings meant that people with autism somehow lacked emotion. Of course that’s not true!” (Prizant, 2015, p. 124).*
- **Discuss**



Difficulty with subtle emotions

“Life tends to be either ‘happy’ or ‘not happy’, ‘angry’ or ‘not angry’.”

Lawson, 2007, p. 118

Can you relate to this?



Autism Myth: Not having empathy

- It is incorrect that autistic people are lacking in empathy...
- Yenn Purkis provides an account of having too much empathy...many autistic people describe being hyper empathetic
- Yenn describes how for some autistic people, that if a person close to them is in pain, that they can : ***“feel the pain themselves and it can be unbearable.”***



Is this something that you have experienced?

Discuss

The autistic experience

- *“For me, I believe that in the presence of strong emotions, too many excitation chemicals are released, causing me to feel overwhelmed not pleasurable enthusiastic”.*
- ((An autistic adult’s experience, take from Evans, Lesko and Attwood, 2014).



Improving emotional recognition: What not to do!

- Ros Blackburn in Prizant (2015) describes how *“for years, people tried to teach me emotions by having me label happy and frowny faces../the problem is that people do not look like that.”*
- *(Prizant, 2015, p. 127).*





Use real faces to practice!

“After 53 years, I can finally understand the whole gamut of emotions. There are many, and varying degrees of each, it has taken a lifetime to achieve this ability”. (Lesko in Evans, Lesko and Attwood, 2014).

The autistic experience

- *“To neurotypicals, it comes naturally...I have had to study people...observe their every move”.*
- ((An autistic adult’s experience, take from Evans, Lesko and Attwood, 2014).



Tips from autistic adults:



Rely on your own strengths.

Using art, drama, music and creative writing may make it easier to express emotions.

Start with your own emotions (if you find this easier), then build up to understanding the emotions of others.

Start with clear, unambiguous emotions first then expanding to more subtle emotions.

Look for patterns.

Ask for clarification from people you trust.

Other tips

- Create an emotions scrapbook: pictures of people you know or yourself experiencing different emotions
- Do people close to you know the emotional language that you use?
- Activities and experiences can help identify how emotions feel! You may only experience awe for the first time whilst appreciating an amazing view. Capture these moments or ask those close to you, record in your scrapbook with pictures and sensations that you experienced. Only joking about the rafting ☺!



Emotion's wheel



- Identify the different sensations that can come with different emotions
- Fantastic emotion sensation wheel from Lindsay Braman. The West Cheshire hub has a professional copy for 1:1 use. Please email Jessica.ellams@westcheshireautismhub.co.uk and she will send to you ☺
- Digital Downloads - LindsayBraman.com

Challenging perceptions



- Keating and Cook (2020) propose that what has been described as a 'deficit' in emotional recognition of others in autistic individuals, may actually be a mismatch of emotional expression between autistic and non autistic individuals.
- Interaction is two way
- Autistic individuals and non autistic individuals may just have different ways of expressing emotions.
- [A Mismatch of Autistic and Non-autistic Facial Expressions – YouTube](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi5GYcqkGBI>



And finally...

- I highly recommend the blog autistic joy:
- <https://autistrhi.com/2020/05/06/joy/>

