

Interoception Support: Strategies and Supports for Regulation

Supports for interoception can be grouped into three levels.

- Level 1: Supports for Body Awareness (Noticing)
- Level 2: Supports to Connect to Emotions
- Level 3: Supports for Regulation

This document explores strategies and supports for **Level 3: Regulation**.

Once there is growing awareness of body signals and what those signals mean, a person can begin to identify what type of action is needed to help the body be safe, healthy, and calm. For example, a full bladder indicates the need to use the bathroom, a racing heartbeat may indicate the need for calming breaths. This is the Regulation level. Below are ideas for supporting this level of interoception.

Strategy One: Co-Regulation Before Self-Regulation

Co-regulation involves connection with someone at a time when the person is too distressed or dysregulated to self-calm or self-regulate. Co-regulation includes assisting youth to recognize when a regulation strategy or support is needed and then how to implement or engage with the strategy or support. Everyone requires co-regulation at times in their lives. Youth with complex needs may require some level of co-regulation through adolescence and into adulthood. For more information, review [Information and Tips for Co-Regulation](#).

Strategy Two: Visual Presentation

Teaching regulation strategies may include modeling, discussion, prompting, and more. Adding a visual component to the instruction can improve the effectiveness of the instruction as well as providing a tool that can be used when the youth needs to use the regulation strategy. When stressed and dysregulated, the visual information is processed more efficiently than verbal information. Examples of visual supports for regulation strategies can be found in the [OCALI Autism Center Grab and Go Gallery of Interventions](#). These include Breathing Cards, Reminder/Cue Cards, and Power Cards.

Strategy Three: Attach Body Signal Directly to Action

At times, it may be best to connect the awareness of the body signals to the need or action without focusing on the emotion. This might be when there is significant dysregulation and focusing on body signals and feelings is too difficult. Examples might include:

- As environmental sounds get louder and more complex, the youth covers his ears, rocks, hums loudly, and is scanning the room. You might say, "There are many sounds in this room, and I see you covering your ears. You might be looking for your headphones". Offer the headphones.
- As a youth walks into the bright classroom with many windows and overhead lighting, you notice hesitation entering, eye squinting, and looking at the floor. You might say, "The sun is really shining in the window and these lights are bright! Would you like to wear your cap and sunglasses?".

Strategy Four: Visual Choices

Have available a choice board of options that may assist a person to connect their body signal to the action needed. This allows the person to move directly to the action that will help regulate without the stress of communicating, "It is too bright in here". For example:

- Place a picture or icon on the choice board that represents, "My eyes feel too much". Add choices to assist such as, "Turn Off Light", "Sunglasses", "Cap", or "Take a Break".
- Place a picture or icon on the choice board that represents, "Feel the need to bite". Add choices that have been found to provide a release such as: "Clapping Hands", "Stomping Feet", or "Jumping Up and Down".
- Place a picture or icon on a choice board that represents, "Big Feeling". Add choices such as "Heavy Blanket", "Quiet Music", "Fidgets to Squeeze", or "Sit with Me".

This strategy can help the person remain regulated and over time may assist the person to learn to identify the feeling or emotion that connects the body signal to the action.

Strategy Five: Visual Scales

Extend the power of visual supports by pairing with visual scales. Once a youth has awareness of their body signals and pairs this with an understanding of when they are becoming dysregulated, visual scales can help the youth remember what to do to regulate. Scales are developed with the youth so that the scale is personalized to that youth's body signals and what calms and regulates the youth. For example, a ringing in the ears may be a signal of emerging dysregulation for a youth and a regulating strategy may be the need to take a walk in a quiet location. Or feeling light-headed may be a signal that requires calm music and yoga breathing. These signals and strategies are placed on a scale in the order of minimal dysregulation to intense dysregulation as identified with the youth's input and approval. Visual scale strategies to consider include [The Stress Thermometer](#) and [The Incredible Five Point Scale](#).