SAMPLE



SIGNALS FROM INNER SPACE

NOTICING EMOTIONAL BODY CUES

Games and Activities for Building Emotional Awareness

MIGHTIER

Overview and Supporting Research

How does anger feel in your cheeks? How does anxiety feel in your stomach? The ability to notice these emotional body cues and interpret them is called **interoception** and is a key and foundational skill in building emotional awareness (Lane & Smith, 2021). It is also a skill that autistic children, as well as children with ADHD or those who have difficulty processing and interpreting sensory information, can have additional difficulty with (Goodall, 2022).

Interoception refers to the process by which the nervous system senses, interprets, and integrates signals originating from within the body, providing a moment-by-moment mapping of the body's internal landscape across conscious and unconscious levels (Khalsa et al., 2018).

Not only is interoception important for understanding physical cues like hunger or the need to use the bathroom, it is also key for understanding and managing emotions. Research shows that interoceptive accuracy has links to emotional processes such as emotion regulation (Füstös et al., 2013) and mental health disorders (Domschke et al., 2010). Interoceptive accuracy in school children was associated with facets of emotional intelligence, including interpersonal intelligence and adaptability (Koch & Pollatos, 2014). Alternatively, dysfunction of interoception is increasingly recognized as an important component of different mental health conditions, including anxiety disorders, mood disorders, eating disorders, addictive disorders, and somatic symptom disorders (Khalsa et al., 2018). Giving children the knowledge and vocabulary of what interoception is and how to use it to support one's emotional intelligence is a key skill.

This unit uses developmentally appropriate play-based learning methods to introduce children to the concept of interoception, let them define their personal experience with various body signals, and identify how this skill can benefit them in their real life. Activities provide a variety of creative opportunities for practice with this skill. Children will work within the metaphor of 'Innernauts,' going on an Inner Space training mission to explore and reset mixed signaling that has occurred.

For therapists who wish to extend children's learning of this topic to their home environment, additional activity sheets can be printed and sent home with children. More information about Mightier's family-facing programming and free educational resources can be found at the end of this activity pack.

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Füstös, J., Gramann, K., Herbert, B. M., & Pollatos, O. (2013). On the embodiment of emotion regulation: interoceptive awareness facilitates reappraisal. Social cognitive and affective neuroscience, 8(8), 911-917.

Georgiou, E., Matthias, E., Kobel, S., Kettner, S., Dreyhaupt, J., Steinacker, J. M., & Pollatos, O. (2015). Interaction of physical activity and interoception in children. Frontiers in psychology, 6, 502.

Goodall, E., (2022). Interoception and mental wellbeing in autistic people. National Autistic Society.

Khalsa, S. S., Adolphs, R., Cameron, O. G., Critchley, H. D., Davenport, P. W., Feinstein, J. S., ... & Zucker, N. (2018). Interoception and mental health: a roadmap. Biological psychiatry: cognitive neuroscience and neuroimaging, 3(6), 501-513.

Koch, A., & Pollatos, O. (2014). Interoceptive sensitivity, body weight and eating behavior in children: a prospective study. Frontiers in psychology, 5, 1003.

Lane, R. D., & Smith, R. (2021). Levels of Emotional Awareness: Theory and Measurement of a Socio-Emotional Skill. Journal of Intelligence, 9(3), 42.

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Notice, Name, Activate!

Interoception is the ability to sense signals coming from inside the body. It helps us notice how we are feeling. Sometimes, it can be hard to name how you feel in the moment. That's why your Innernaut training is so important. It will help you detect how emotions feel in your body so you can know how you feel and what you need.

For example, when it's been a long day your body might be sending you signals that you're tired. You may yawn, or your eyelids get droopy. Your solution may be to take a nap, or to move around to wake yourself up. Or, when you're in the middle of an argument with someone, you might notice that you're fists are clenched and realize you're angry. What you need here may be to calm down by taking a walk or some deep breaths.

Innernatus have a three-step process:

1. **Notice** body signals

2. **Name** the feeling(s)

3. **Activate** coping skills

For example, pretend you arrive at your friend's party. There is music, games, and loads of food. It looks fun! But you don't see anyone you know. All of a sudden, you feel different. Up in the Command Center, your Innernauts are hard at work.

"Noticing dry throat, heart beating fast, and a dizzy sensation…. We're nervous!"
"Activate coping skill: Grounding!" You move to stand against a wall and focus on how your back feels against something solid. Your heart rate calms down, and you feel like yourself again. You're ready to join the group. Nice work, Innernaut!

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Communication Station

Your body is a communicator - sending you important signals about how you feel and what you need. Sometimes these signals are about things your body needs, like food, water, and warmth. Sometimes these signals are about your emotional needs, like needing to feel loved, needing to calm down, or needing to feel safe.

Directions:
Fill in answers for each question below. If you do this with a partner, see if your answers are the same or different.

1. How does your body tell you that it's dehydrated? What is it saying it needs?

2. How does your body tell you that you're low-energy? What is your body saying it needs?

3. How does your body tell you that you have a cold? What is your body saying it needs?

4. How does your body tell you that you're embarrassed? What is your body saying it needs?

5. How does your body tell you that you're angry? What is your body saying it needs?

6. How does your body tell you that you're uncomfortable? What is your body saying it needs?

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Innernaut Body Map

For each of the body maps below, read the emotion and think about what signals your body sends when you experience that emotion.

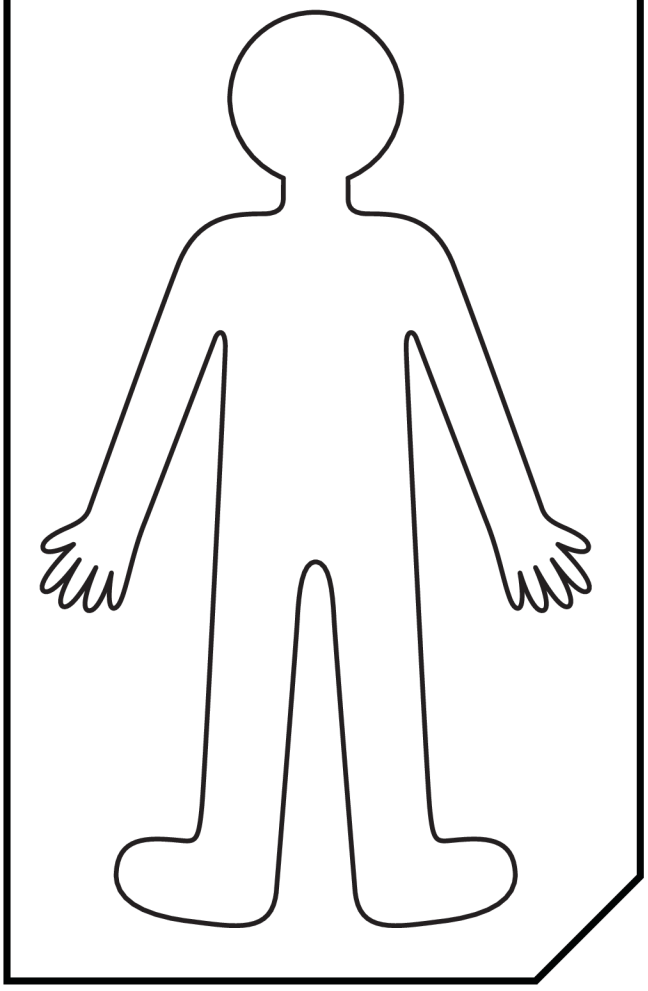
Then choose at least 3 body signals (or make up your own) and write the word or draw the image near the part where that signal is felt in your body.

What does your body need when it feels each of these emotions?

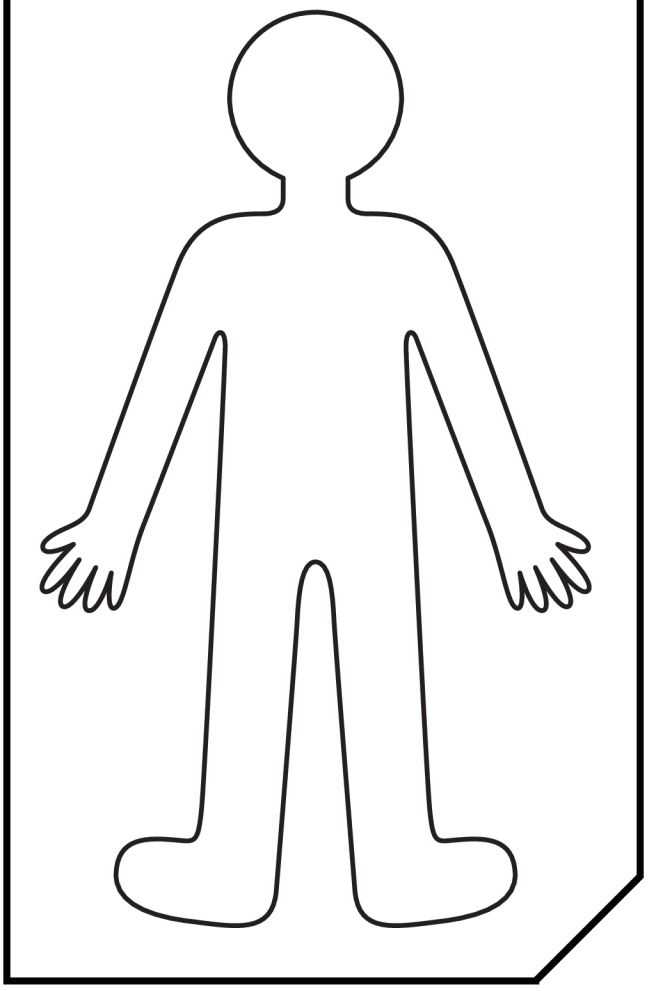
Body Signal Key

Shaky	Relaxed	Cold	Goosebumps
Tense	Dizzy	Balanced	Pounding
Fast	Rumbling	Sweaty	Hot
	Tingly	Slow	Dry

Where do you feel ***frustration***?



Where do you feel ***stress***?

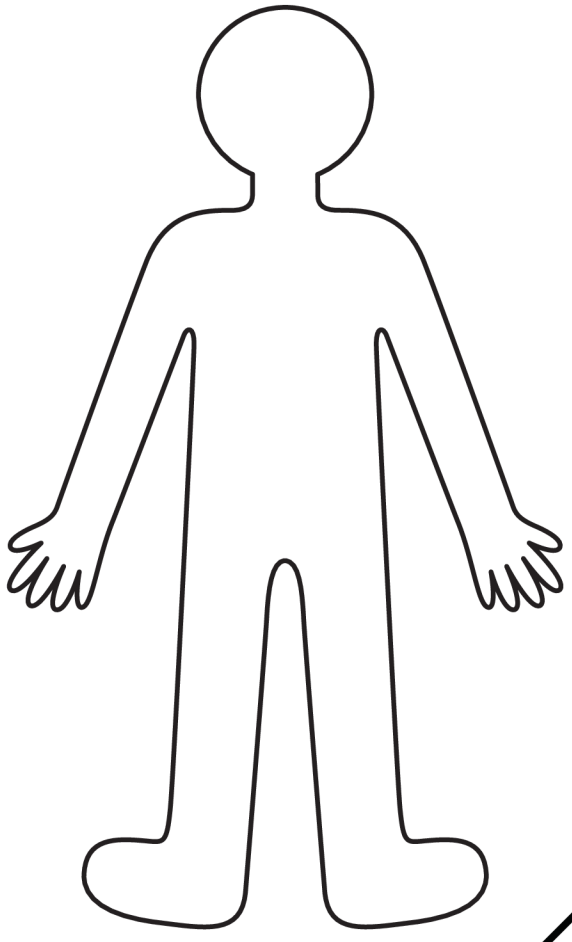


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Innernaut Body Map

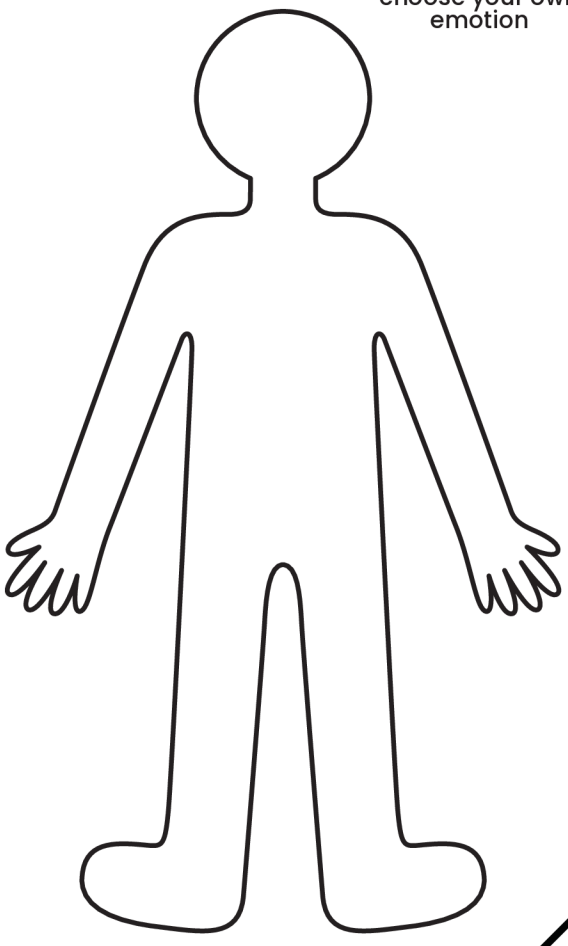
Body Signal Key			
Relaxed	Cold	Goosebumps	
Shaky	Dizzy	Balanced	Pounding
Tense	Rumbling	Sweaty	Hot
Fast	Tingly	Slow	Dry

Where do you feel ***nervous***?



Where do you feel _____ ?

choose your own emotion



Which emotion sends the most body signals?

_____

What body signal do you feel with multiple emotions?

_____

Lesson 2
Activity 3

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