

10 WAYS TO BUILD FELT-SAFETY AND INTEROCEPTIVE AWARENESS (SO MASKING ISN'T THE ONLY OPTION)

1 Lead with safety, not expectations.

Interoception thrives in safe conditions. If someone's body is stuck in survival mode, they're not available for noticing or regulating their body for learning. Felt safety comes first—every time.

2 Be the one who adapts.

When something doesn't go well, pause and reflect on your role in the situation. What might you shift to help the other person feel more supported and safe?

3 Move beyond compliance—support real participation.

Approaches that rely on rewards, consequences, forced eye contact, or scripted social skills may look successful on the outside—but often cause deeper harm, fueling masking and disconnection from interoceptive experiences. Instead of forcing someone through a task, ask: What would help them feel safe enough to participate in a way that works for their body? Participation should feel possible—not pressured.

4

Explore the body signals together with genuine curiosity.

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5

Interoception is personal. Validate what's felt—even when you don't understand it.

If someone shares a body signal, sensation, or emotion, believe them.

6

Adjust the environment, not the person

The environment—including people, expectations, and supports (or lack thereof)—profoundly shapes participation. Set up spaces that support sensory, emotional, and social safety. When challenges arise, shift the surroundings—not the person.

7

Promote multiple forms of communication.

Seek different methods of gaining insight into a person's inner experience. Many times, providing a variety of communication options—including spoken, signed, texted, pointed, typed, drawn, or gestured—opens the door to connection. Every form of expression matters.

8 **Let identity lead.**

Each person's interoceptive experience is shaped by their neurotype, culture, gender, body, communication style, and lived experiences. Respect and celebrate these differences. Don't assume sameness—what feels good, safe, or regulating for one person may feel overwhelming or harmful to another. Support them in discovering what works for their body and identity.

9 **Know when to step back.**

If something's not working, reflect and tweak—don't push harder.

10 **Build trust slowly.**

Healing and unmasking take time. Go at the pace of safety, not urgency.