

“Less Compliance” Community Booklet

*A collaborative booklet
with community input on
what “less compliance”
really means*



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Meet Kelly



Dear Reader,

Thank you for being here. This booklet grew from the generosity of more than 300 people who shared their perspectives through our survey, live group discussion, and social media community, but it's also for those of you opening these pages for the very first time. Whether you contributed your voice or you're arriving now with your own lived experience, questions, and courage, you're part of this collective. I'm deeply grateful you're here.

My own shift away from compliance hasn't been easy. I've felt unsure, isolated, and torn between what systems expect and what bodies actually need. I'm still learning, unlearning, and doing my best—just like so many of you.

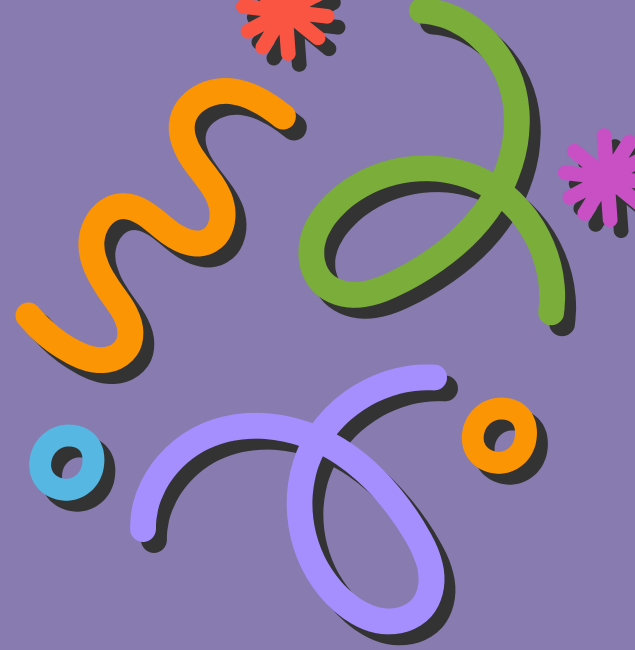
This booklet is a companion for that journey. Inside, you'll find practical language, real examples, and community-sourced strategies for navigating pushback and advocating for approaches grounded in inner curiosity, safety, autonomy, and body trust. My hope is that it helps you feel supported rather than alone, especially in the moments when speaking up feels hard.

Thank you for your courage and for being part of a movement that honors inner experience over compliance. Together, we can create environments where dignity, connection, and true interoception growth thrive.

With gratitude,

Kelly Mahler

About This Booklet



This booklet is organized around a series of questions, misconceptions, and everyday challenges that often arise when shifting to a less compliance-focused approach.

For each one, you'll find a collection of word-for-word responses from our community, filled with practical ideas, perspectives, and language that many people have found helpful.

Below is the order of the questions included in this resource:

Question 1:

Some think “less compliance” means no rules, no structure, or kids doing whatever they want. In your own words, how do you explain what “less compliance” really means?

Question 2:

Speaking of myths, what's the biggest misconception you've heard about “less compliance”? And how would you respond to it?

Question 3 (Responding to Naysayers 1):

How would you respond to this statement?

“If we show attention during big behaviors, we'll reinforce the bad behavior.”

Question 4 (Responding to Naysayers 2):

How would you respond to this statement?

“We can’t let them get out of this task or they will think they can get away with everything.”

Question 5 (Responding to Naysayers 3):

How would you respond to this statement?

“If we don’t enforce strict compliance, they’ll never learn to be tough and build resilience.”

Question 6:

Please complete this sentence:

“I used to think compliance _____, now I know _____.”

Question 7 (Responding with Curiosity 1):

How would you respond to this situation?

A child repeatedly blurts out answers in class.

Question 8 (Responding with Curiosity 2):

How would you respond to this situation?

A child asks to use the bathroom many, many times a day.

Question 9 (Responding with Curiosity 3):

How would you respond to this situation?

A child frequently tries to run out of (elope from) the cafeteria or grocery store.

This resource was designed to be flexible, supportive, and collaborative. However you choose to engage with these pages, may you find ideas that can be woven into your own context with curiosity, care, and confidence.



Question #1

Some think “less compliance” means no rules, no structure, kids doing whatever they want.

In your own words, how do you explain what “less compliance” really means?



“Dropping what can be dropped. Not having rules for no real reason. Keeping the ones that are absolutely necessary. Taking a low demand approach.”

“You work in collaboration with your clients. Together you create spaces where you can create goals and the paths to meeting those goals with support.”

“I feel less compliance means rules and structure that are in place are not able to be followed.”

“Listening to your child going with your gut and not feeling like your a failure when things go wrong.”

“Not doing things just because you are told to (adult instructed) but being allowed to develop and learn to understand 'why' we do things, doing them because it is genuine, useful, purposeful and meaningful and also operate as an individual within a group rather than as a robot/sheep mentality.”

“It means choosing your battles and only addressing compliance in situations where it is necessary for health and safety. I ask myself “does my kid need to follow this direction to be safe or to keep me from being uncomfortable?” And if it’s the latter, I’m learning to let it go!”

“Being aware of what is keeping your kids “stuck” and helping them around it with extra time or with a different way of getting something done.”

“Child-motivated which increases learning opportunities!”

“Prioritizing connection and regulation. Unrestricted access to breaks followed by returning to the same task. Staff flexibility.”

“Less compliance means that following your direct instructions is not the main priority. It means that we value connection and respect the clients and people we work with more than just blindly following what we say. It means we value teaching self-advocacy and will listen when the people we work with use their skills.”

“I feel like it’s choice.. I try to think ahead to know what the choices can be that are realistic, but I’m not always on my toes about things. It can be hard to shift the “rules” or what you set out to do/the task at hand, when there is push back. I try to use open mindedness.. “ok, how I planned isn’t working out, I need us to be able to get the clothes put away, how can you help?””

“Kids are able to express feelings, opinions, etc. and the adult has an open mind to process with the student the best course of action.”

“Less Compliant means that young people able to be critical thinkers who know their needs and make decisions based on these needs. Needs are not wants.”

“Meeting student needs not adult needs.”

“Listening to kids and respecting their limits. Sometimes it is too hard to do the thing adults are requiring. We can learn a lot by watching and waiting.”

“Less compliance shifts the focus away from assuming there should be an automatic connection between an adult giving a command and the child executing. We should not expect or want a child to comply simply because a directive was given, we should strive for creating situations where the child meets an expectation because they trust the adult, they understand what is being asked of them (and why), and they have both the resources and skills to be successful.”

“Giving grace because the child is actually physiologically incapable, in that moment, of executing a demand as you have requested, therefore needs to have “less compliance” allowed...you wouldn’t expect someone who is on fire to remember to use their “nice manners” when asking someone to help them put out the raging fire consuming their body, would you? In a similar way, when our children are triggered, and experiencing a “fight or flight” response their bodies are sending them stress responses which are telling them that they are in danger and therefore they should NOT comply with the environment around them, but rather “fight” or “run away from” anything in their environment...this physiological urge is life saving, in the same way that your body would be screaming at you to stop a fire from burning your flesh, if your skin were in fire...”

“More student voice and choice-presenting options and choices. Being open minded that there are many different ways to show learning.”

“Getting to the root cause of a behavior in order to meet the need at that level”

“Listen to your body and needs. Teaching/learning respectful self-advocacy and self-awareness. Of course still safety rules. And expectations that are developmentally appropriate and that have some flexibility for fluctuating capacity.”

“Child is given choice, adult is not only in power”

“I think it means more about letting the student lead. Working where they are at. Still doing what has to be done but working together.”

“Encouraging myself and my daughter to take a pause to check in with what's needed.”

“Check yourself for the feeling of “have to”. Check with the other person's for their experience. Start there and question if it is true & why. Begin a bigger conversation of true goals.”

Less compliance means not forcing a student/yourself to focus so much on “sitting still and “being good” that they are unable to fully participate with the instructional content because “being good” is the most important thing to the teacher and society”

“Following the child's lead and interests and allowing them the autonomy to make choices in what they do”

“Less blind compliance. Young children naturally want to question and understand why expectations are in place. I want my students to feel safe to share their “no” or “why” - this doesn't mean I don't follow through with expectations, but that there is a reason for the expectation (usually safety and respect) and that it's still my job to hold to them - BUT the child's input and feelings are valued and they are safe to share “unwanted” feelings and resistance.”

“It means that my focus is on building skills, rather than getting obedience (compliance). My interpretation of behavior starts with an assumption that whatever the child is doing stems from an attempt to get needs met, so my job is to work with that flow rather than demanding compliance that requires the child to ignore their own needs.”

“Honoring autonomy and teaching boundary setting”

“For me “less compliance” means showing flexibility in how a child shows the skills they have or that are being targeted, even if it is not exactly in the way I envisioned.”

“Listening more, asking for truth telling, reminders this is a safe place to share, collaboration, trial and error, natural consequences can be experienced.”

““Less compliance” means more quality focused collaborative work, to me. It gives a child the opportunity to self advocate and produce something (a behavior, a task, etc) they understand and take ownership in, which actually aligns with the goals of the educator/parent/therapist.”

““Less Compliance” is providing structure, like a scaffold, that allows a student to participate in a way that is most comfortable for them by honoring their needs and relying on their strengths and interests so that they feel safe while developing the skills they need to grow in their participation.”

“Less compliance means empowering and valuing kids and teaching them that their experience/needs matter.”

“Less compliance means more active participation and more internal motivation to complete tasks. When the child understands the task, is regulated and has the skills task completion will occur.”

“Trauma informed way of building trust to help kids feel safe and in control (within bounds as in there are still rules to follow for safety etc) it allows children to feel a sense of control in a world which up until now has been so out of control and scary for them.”

“Setting healthy boundaries”

“More critical thinking, more listening to my body, more communication”

“I think less compliance means following a child’s lead and focusing on connection to build motivation not external reward or punishment”

Focus on building relationships and creating a natural predictable structure that is flexible and based on mutual respect.”

“Willingness to work within a student's capacity to share engagement in tasks -- not so much 'Do as I say', but more 'Let's do this together in a way that works for you'”

“Keen understanding about what's going on in children's minds and bodies, at the same time have clear boundaries that honor differences and aligned with socio-cultural values”

“Creating Connections with kids and creating safe routines and environments for them.”

“Less compliance means tuning into the body's own signals and responding to what the body is saying rather than taking actions that are more likely to conform to other's expectations or wishes (people pleasing)”

“Coming from the patriarchal medical systems viewpoint that I grew up with, compliance meant going along with someone in authority's rules for you “that knows better.””

““Less compliance” means that when a child struggles to follow rules or meet expectations, you first think critically about the rules and expectations and whether they are necessary or beneficial. If they truly are, you then explore why the child is struggling and consider what you can change or how you can provide support to enable the child to follow the rules or meet expectations. If the rules or expectations are not necessary or are not a net benefit, you change or remove those rules or expectations accordingly.”

“In disability where compliance training is fitting individuals into a pre set mold, less compliance would allow for more individuality, individuals being free to be themselves and not forced to surprise their method of expression.”

“Less compliance shifts from forcing kids to do what they are being told, to instead providing opportunities for them to meaningfully engage in an activity we'd like them to do.”

“Less forcing and manipulation, less coercion, more dropping expectations (which might look like letting someone not work on something, but it might also look like being surprised and following their interests)”

“Less compliance means more options and alternatives than the strict rules. Flexibility.”

“Less compliance means you’re paying more attention to the interoceptive messages of a child’s body. It’s giving them the autonomy that they deserve as little humans trying to regulate in a busy world. While gently shaping their understanding of how to regulate their emotions and responses to situations.

“It means not expecting students to follow every "command" or expectation placed on them. They are human, and deserve to have harder moments. During those harder moments, it is our job to support and regulate them. Less compliance also means inviting kids to be an active participant in these expectations by having a say in what they participate in, why they participate in it, who they participate with, and when and how they participate. It is not giving kids free rein, but giving them more say in what they are doing and making sure their needs and wants are considered.”

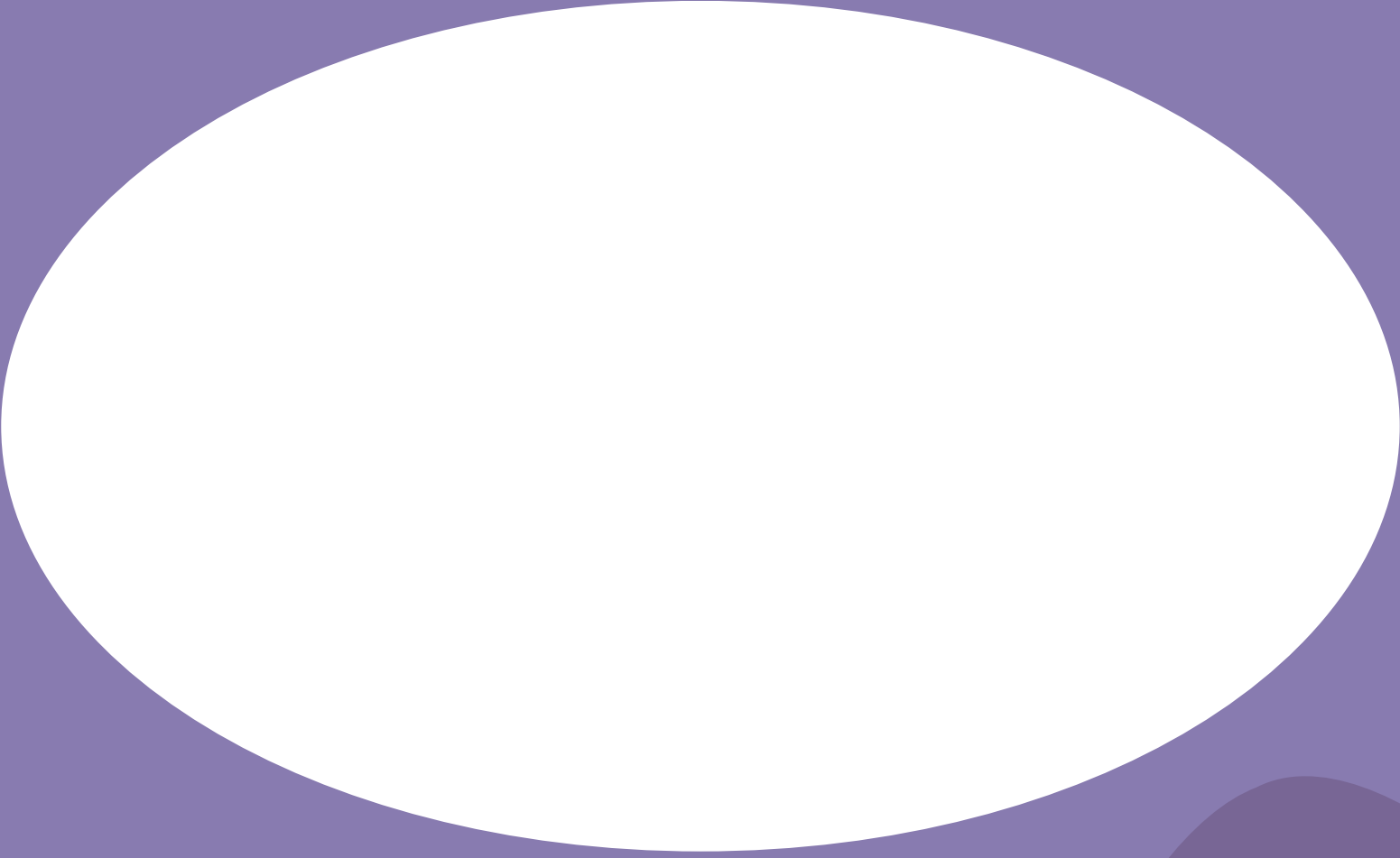
“Less compliance means stepping away from authoritarian control, not from caring adult leadership. We can let go of a focus on compliance and still offer structure, guidance, and clear boundaries, while caring about the child’s emotional world.”

“Less compliance means the person is involved in the solution”.

“The goal is not compliance. It doesn't mean there aren't rules or expectations, just that we can be flexible and work through things in different ways.”

“Less compliance is not about having no rules or boundaries. Instead, it's about being flexible about rules and boundaries, knowing when someone can follow them and when they can't, and supporting them in those moments.”

REFLECTION



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Question #2

Speaking of myths, what's the biggest misconception you've heard about "less compliance"?

And how would you respond to it?



“If you let one do that/have that etc then they will all do it and then it will be chaos. Response - 'do we all wear glasses just because one person does? everyone require individual support and that is how we should be approaching a strategy'”

“Kids won't learn how to be respectful or follow adult directions if we don't focus on compliance. To which I say that teaching kids to obey every time, no questions asked, can set kids up to for victimization because they never learn that it's ok to say no or to advocate for themselves.”

“I've seen people take the less compliance phrase and use to have 0 expectations for their students. My response to this is that kids respect loving accountability.”

“The child is in control. The child only thinks they are in control because they are actively involved in the decision making process; however, you are the one providing those decisions for that child to make so you are in constant control.”

“That we are just being too soft. “If you don't make kids comply, they'll walk all over you.” Actually, it's the opposite. When we move away from compliance-based approaches, we're not giving up authority— we're redefining it. We're saying “I'm still the adult, I still set boundaries, but I do it

with you, not to you.” Kids are more likely to respect boundaries when they feel respected within them. They don't need to be controlled — they need to feel safe, seen, and heard. And when those needs are met, cooperation comes more naturally. I go back to the research and try to explain what it is saying”

“They just won't listen... I wonder, are you listening to them?”

“That there will be no structure to learning environments. Give examples of what we see through supporting individuals out of education.”

“Kids won't learn how to follow rules which does not do them any favors as they get older/ in the community. I respond there are still guidelines especially for safety, but accommodations and flexibility are used to help the child function in the environment”

“People's big misconception seems to be that when they learned to be compliant and learned to work/live in a broken system they accepted it as a healthy way (right way) to go through life and the skill (harm) must be perpetuated in others.”

““Chaos will rule” is probably the biggest less compliance theory I have heard especially in consideration of classroom management. My response is usually that natural order goes against chaos. Strict rules are typically not necessary except for safety and those should be maintained—but what purpose does silence and stillness serve? Fostering autonomy can improve classroom management by allowing students to regulate in meaningful ways.”

““Children don't need to listen to adults” – I would respond with the information given above. It is a natural and important part of development to learn to say “no”.”

“I'd say the biggest myth is that successfully managing behavior in children is about compliance. I'd respond that with a focus on compliance you might get short-term behavioral results, but long-term skill building and brain changes require a different approach.”

"That kids won't be prepared for the "real world" Response - kids are more prepared for the real world and less prone to abuse if they practice honoring their needs and decision making now."

"That "less compliance" = no expectations. I would explain that expectations are still present, but might look different than people are accustomed to seeing."

"Less compliance equals disrespectful, lazy people. "Is your current approach working, why not try something different?""

"Myth: we are reinforcing their behavior- Response: we are honoring their communication style to tell us that this is undesirable RIGHT NOW. Does not mean that they will never get to it."

"That it's a way to avoid teaching. I would say that it's a different way to teach."

"That kids will grow up with no boundaries and basically be selfish and rude. Deal with this by exploring the concept of leading by example (why would they act a way they never see), considering together what we would like the child to feel is appropriate and explore different opinions with the children"

"Children will have no boundaries- Boundaries and honouring childrens wellbeing can work in harmony"

"Misconception "If you don't do as you're told you'll never learn anything" response....we each have our own way of learning."

“The biggest misconception I sometimes see from very well-intentioned parents and some clinicians (more so online) is that in order to let go of compliance, we need to give up our adult responsibility to guide, teach, and protect children. In reality, we can let go of compliance and claim a healthier form of leadership rooted in connection and our respective roles. When parents or clinicians confuse less compliance with permissiveness, children can feel unsafe. Gordon Neufeld has written a lot about this from an attachment-informed, developmental perspective. This is especially true for neurodivergent children, who are already very sensitive to threat and need safe caregivers they can co regulate with, and who will provide the clear and predictable structure they may need to truly feel safe. Permissiveness can feel almost as unsafe as authoritarianism, because neither offers true attunement to the child’s deepest developmental needs.”

“The biggest misconception I’ve heard about less compliance is that your spoiling your child. The child has all of the control and gets to do whatever they want. They “run all over you”. Some people aren’t seeing the depth to having emotionally conversations with kids. They feel its making them too soft and unable to listen to adults and do as they’re told. When in reality its teaching emotional intelligence and self regulation instead of holding in negative feelings and complying to an adult and the relationship and trust being diminished every time they have to comply without feeling heard or respected.

““They would never participate”- My response is “well how are they participating now. Is it quality work, are they truly showing us what they know?””

“Misconception “If you don’t do as you’re told you’ll never learn anything” response.... we each have our own way of learning.”

“Less compliance means children will not work for the goal and that they will cause chaos and “ruin everything” for the rest. Giving up on idea of micromanaging and control actually makes room for growth! We can replace compliance with micromanaging most of the time (when it is not related to safety). Adults absolutely detest micromanaging, and it actually creates more work for the person in charge. I do not understand why this principle is applied to children. An educator may give options A, B and C, but what if the student takes option D? How is this harmful?”

““The child will win and think they can get away with anything.” We are not looking for the child to “get out of” the task but rather explore what about the task or environment that might be dysregulating so that the child can participate in a way this is comfortable for them. Let’s try to redefine what participation can look like.”

“Less compliance does not mean no demands or getting away with not doing the work, it means listening to the child, getting curious and offering choices to help the student complete the tasks.”

“That the child can do whatever they want and can “throw a tantrum”. Meltdowns aren’t tantrums. Meltdowns are needs not being met and often needs that the child does not know how to communicate or meet themselves. We need to provide support for regulation, especially for the child to learn”

“The biggest myths are deeply entrenched in parenting culture.. things like ‘all kids need boundaries to feel safe’ or ‘if you give them an inch, they’ll take a mile’. I think boundaries and learning limits are important, but these myths underpin a culture that punishes and pushes kids into ignoring their own needs. Ultimately, teaching kids self knowledge and self advocacy is what matters most.”

“Children are deliberately naughty testing the adults. There are age brackets where testing the boundaries are acceptable and learning how to navigate this developing sense of independence is needed to learn social skills. Children are seldom deliberate, they are more often in overload either on a sensory or emotional regulation level due to the demands in the environment, where they do not have access to their full language, reasoning and problem-solving capacity. Therefore they do not yet have the skill to self regulate effectively and the adults need to facilitate these skills through co-regulation for children to learn to regulate more effectively as they grow older.”

“I believe there might be a fear around less compliance. A parent might identify other parents as lazy and not disciplining their child. I feel responsive parenting is probably much more draining rather than punitive punishment based on the child's non-compliance.”

“That the person will never learn to function within rules without help”

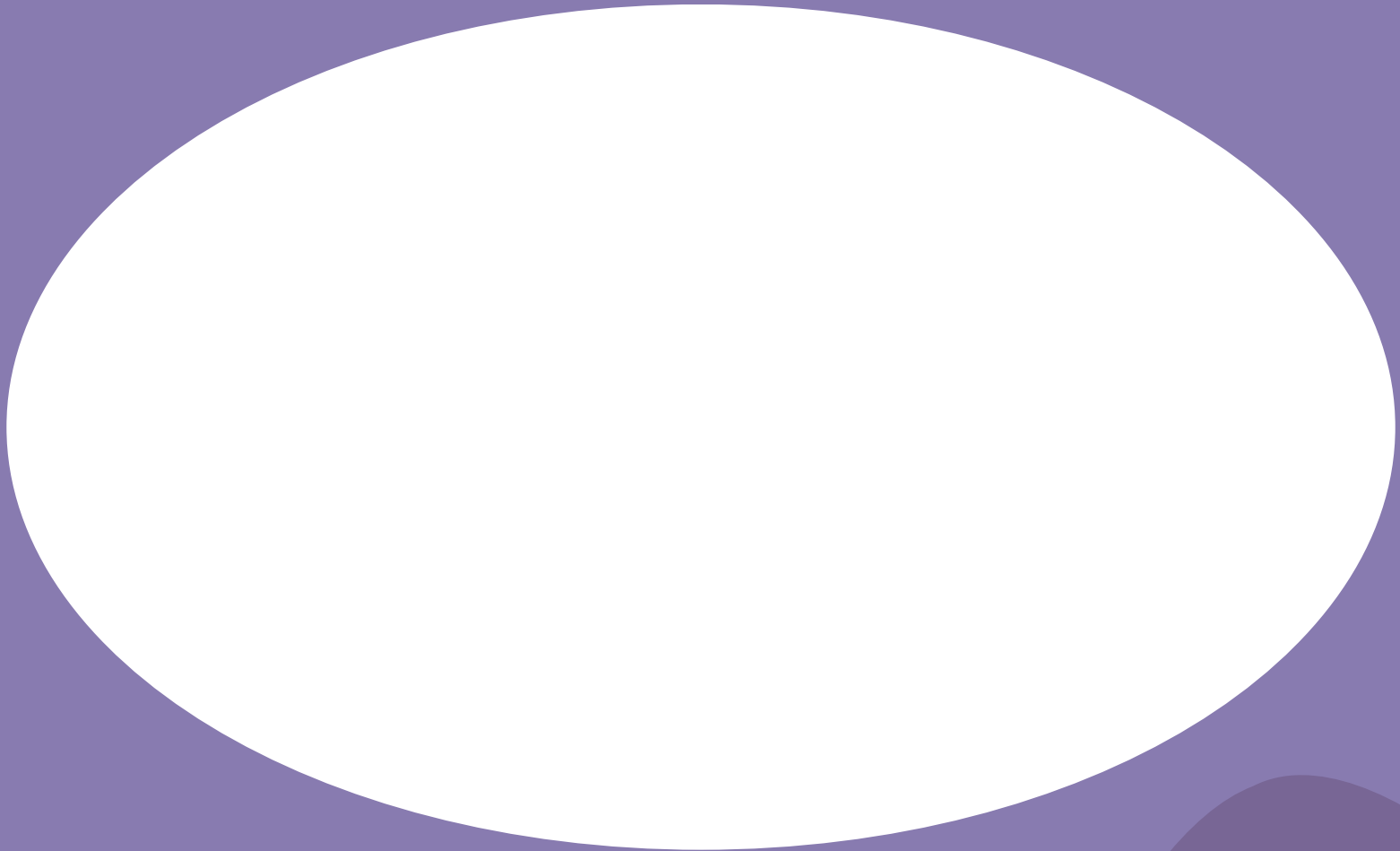
“Letting kids do whatever they want, no expectations”

“‘Give an inch, will take a mile’; fear of losing control of the person/situation”

“Emotional regulation meaning quiet and calm. Emotional regulation is safely being able to experience physical and emotional sensations in a way that is authentic and safe for the person themselves.”

“Less compliance will lead to a spoiled and lazy individual with big behaviors”

REFLECTION



Want to learn more about interoception? Take our most popular course!

The image shows the cover of a course titled "3 Steps to Nurturing Interoception". At the top left, the AOTA logo is displayed with the text "American Occupational Therapy Association" and "Approved Provider" below it. The title "3 Steps to Nurturing Interoception" is written in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below the title is a photograph of a woman, Kelly Mahler, standing in front of a colorful, abstract background with swirling patterns in shades of green, yellow, pink, and purple. At the bottom of the cover, the name "Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L" is printed in a smaller font.

AOTA American Occupational Therapy Association
Approved Provider

3 Steps to Nurturing Interoception

Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L



Question #3

Responding to Naysayers (first): some people resist moving away from compliance. How would you respond to this statement?

“If we show attention during big behaviors, we’ll reinforce the bad behavior.”



“Child is seeking connection and needs support for co-regulating.”

“We are coregulation partners and must share our calm with our students.”

“I usually reframe it and try to help the team to think in a proactive way, figure out what is causing the behavior, and help them to find productive ways to regulate their body.”

“If you leave them alone / neglect them in big behaviors they are more likely to associate that behavior with shame and shameful ness. Shame leads to more extreme behaviors.”

“Most people are in pain with big behaviors. We need to support one another and to do that we need to communicate to each other even with big behaviors.”

“If we react to big behaviors as fundamentally having more to do with us as teachers/therapists than for the student/client, we'll never be able to encourage authentic growth. Behaving in a certain way in order to not be punished does not increase self-awareness of the reason and impact of the behavior. Many people are simply trying to survive and finding a way that is more acceptable to all fosters mutual respect.”

That sounds like base textbook ABA methodology. It's not going to work on all kids, they're all different and so are their parents. Finding the balance between the abilities of the parent and the child is where to start.”

“Not always. What are they trying to tell us? Sometimes ignoring does work, but often if we ignore what they are showing us, we miss important communication from them.”

“Behavior is driven by emotion and we cannot reinforce emotions.”

“I think if we ignore big behaviors (and therefore big feelings) we show our kids that they are too much, we can't handle their big feelings, and that they should shove them down and hide them which of course makes their big behaviors more likely to happen without as much possibility to manage them.”

“This was another bone of contention for me with my administration. I used to use planned ignoring until I knew better. I found that when I comforted and assisted in regulating students, the big behaviors lessened. This was reinforced with the data I collected. Again, though I was just seen as an oddball.”

“If we show attention during the big behaviors we are affirming the child's feelings, recognizing something was too big for them, and supporting them by modeling techniques until their nervous system is regulated again.”

“If we help co-regulate them during big behaviors, we can work on teaching them when they are calm.”

Connection before correction. They must be experiencing a lot of stress right now to be displaying such big behaviors! I wonder why they need to feel safe?”

“We need to be attentive and observe what they are showing us. What are they communicating?”

“Behavior is communication. Knowing what is under the behavior is the tool to solving the problem. Ignoring “negative” behaviors may be showing our children that they do not deserve our attention unless they are happy. When they are melting down, they need our co-regulation most!”

“If a child is having a big behavior, they're also having a big emotion and humans deserve to be nurtured through tough times. If you help them through that big behavior, you're increasing your positive relationship to front load preventative work to prevent additional big behaviors.”

“Behavior is very complex. We don't always know what happened 10 sec, 1 hour, 1 day, or 1 month ago. There could have been stress building up. We need to show our kids coregulation and let them know they are in a safe space versus ignoring them.”

“It's skill not will. Get curious find the reason for the big behavior, it's probably related to sensory or emotional dysregulation. Once you find the reason you can start to help the child through that experience. Accept all forms of self-advocacy as valid. Help the child through the experience at the first sign that something is wrong, you'll find that the “big behaviors” get smaller and smaller because they learn that you will help and that their reactions doesn't need to be so big to get you to notice that they are struggling!”

“We should create a safe space by acknowledging the frustration or whatever they are feeling”

“The big behaviors are the signs that something is “wrong” meaning a mismatch between demand and capacity, ability and performance often without the language to define it.”

“They probably don't want to be experiencing this. They are so distressed that they are having this big reaction. We can coregulate and help calm them, teach them self determination (advocating for themselves, calming themselves), and also teach different ways to get what they need without this behavior.”

During big behaviors, students aren't processing what's going on. Students' behavior is a communication tool. They do well when they can. It's not a choice to act out.”

Staying close and maintaining a safe, calm presence is not the same as encouraging or allowing unsafe things to happen. Often the behavior will just get bigger and bigger until the thing the person is trying to communicate is received and responded to. “

“Behaviour is communication. The behaviour is happening for a reason. Attachment is so important for children. As an adult, how would you feel if you were reaching out for help and you were ignored or punished? Believe in the good – children are trying their best. It is our responsibility as parents/caregivers/professionals to help children and that often involves figuring out what the child is trying to communicate and/or what the child needs. Ignoring a child's needs (by ignoring “behaviour”) can be traumatic for the child and can lead to learned helplessness, negative mental health consequences, and more.”

“Attention to the big behaviors and understanding, from both sides, provides a basic understanding to develop a co-plan where all participants play a role.”

"I think that is really unnatural to ignore big behaviors. Emotions associated with "bad behaviors" can and should be identified and acknowledged so that we can help our clients better understand what underlies them. Teaching self-advocacy, learning awareness of internal/external triggers, modeling how to take responsibility for behaviors and methods to regulate/repair relationships impacted by the behaviors."

"Perhaps we need to reflect what in the environment is causing big behaviours. Perhaps we are working with a young person who just needs recognition and acceptance (I hear that's pretty much all of them)."

"The aim is not to stay in big behaviours. Rather it is to learn the why of the big behaviour and how to move on. Validation of the emotions is not the story it is merely one step in the process of understanding big behaviours so people can feel more balance in their responses to life."

"CONNECTION and COREGULATION are often key to supporting behavior. Children need to be taught to self-regulate, and the best way is through co-regulation. If you are ignoring them when dysregulated, then they are missing an opportunity for learning how to regulate appropriately. Ignoring them often severs connections that have been made, because they feel abandoned by someone they trusted."

"It is not about seeking attention. When we look at behaviors as communication tools, from a trauma informed lens, we know that most of the behavior that is classified as "attention seeking" is actually "connection, safety seeking""

“But what defines a “bad” behaviour? Why are they feeling the need to do it? Could it be misunderstanding or lack of validation from caregivers around them?”

“Attention is not necessarily what they are seeking with the behaviour. It helps if we change the word attention to connection. If they regularly seek connection through behaviour, what would happen if we made sure they have frequent opportunities for connection?”

“Love is the answer, to all things. Big behaviors need to be met with love and curiosity.”

“If someone is clearly in distress, they need comfort and co-regulation in a way that helps them to feel safe. Building this relationship and enabling the person to feel safe is a journey for all of us. It's not about reinforcement of 'bad' behaviors – it's listening to the person in distress.”

“You can still have boundaries in place, but these need to be communicated when a child is able to process the information, which is absolutely not when they are in the middle of fight/flight! Keeping everyone safe until things are calm should be the priority, then having restorative conversations to support emotional growth– these are the only ways for children and adults to learn how to manage big feelings. Giving them another big feeling (fear of breaking the rules/ getting in trouble) is not a long term strategy to improvement.”

“We need to be mindful about what caused the big behaviour and how the person is feeling, if they feel listened too, validated, and their concerns are addressed then they won't get to the point of needing the big behaviour. Is it a behaviour, or is it communication because words don't work?”

“I use examples of successful times with the students we serve. For example, we had a student that insisted upon leaving the school. They were readily trying to push the front doors open, were starting to shut down to verbal input from staff and showing some aggression in the moment. We modeled bringing in visuals where they could sit and relax. Choices that have made them feel safe and heard before. One picture was of the sensory gym and another of Legos with a trusted adult. The student chose Legos, and when they were in a place to talk again, a timer was set to return to class. The student was successful in returning and worked for the last 15 minutes of class. I shared with a naysayer (who thought we just let them play instead of holding them accountable) that if we pushed for compliance the bigger behaviors would have lasted much longer and we would have missed out on the connection and the student successfully participating in class. Which would be categorized as a bigger win for both the adult and the child?”

“All behavior is communication. If we don't try to understand what they're communicating, we can't help solve the concern.”

“Most of the time, what we call “big behaviors” are stress responses, not deliberate choices. The child's nervous system is dysregulated – in fight, flight, or freeze – and their behavior is communication, not manipulation.”

“We're not reinforcing bad behavior; we're reinforcing the relationship. Responding to distress isn't rewarding behavior – it's restoring safety.”

“When someone is this upset, they are not using their whole brain. Learning and problem-solving only happen once the nervous system feels safe again.”

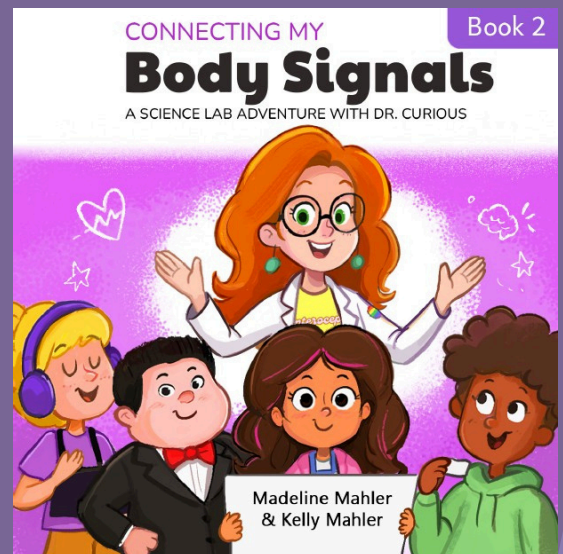
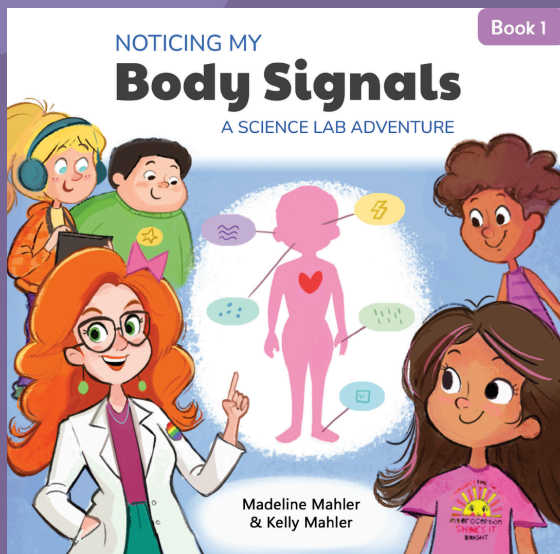
“If they’re having big behaviors, they’re not in a place to learn. I’d rather help them de-escalate and return to regulation than battle for compliance in a moment where learning isn’t possible.”

“You can still have boundaries – but they need to be communicated when a child is regulated enough to process them. Connection before correction.”

“When we move away from compliance as the goal, we make space for connection, trust, and meaningful growth. That’s not permissiveness – it’s progress.”

REFLECTION

Want to learn more? Check out our Kid's Book Series!





Question #4

**Responding to Naysayers (second):
some people resist moving away from
compliance. How would you respond to
this statement?**

**“We can’t let them get out of this task
or they will think they can get away
with everything.”**



“Lets back up a bit and think about why is this task being completed so important to you? what tiny demands around it can be modified to meet the child where he/she is at. The tasks can still be done but maybe not in the exact manner we expect, not exactly when we say, who it is done with, etc. A lot of the characteristics of the task have room for accommodation and this is where we can honour the child and ourselves as to where we are at. Brainstorming as to the best way to get the task done and how it is presented to the child. Many times we will find out that really the task does not NEED to be done, it is us that are placing that expectation.”

“Is it really the end of the world if they don't do this one task, but meanwhile are achieving all their other goals?”

The first question is – why is completing this task important? Who is it important to? If it really is important for the individual, why are they hesitant or resisting completing it? Is it fear? Is it that it is too hard? Is it that the task is or seems irrelevant to them?”

“No, we are meeting them where they are and co-creating boundaries to keep everyone safe.”

“Is it necessary? If not, let the expectation go and allow them to choose. Respect their decisions and work with them.”

“Teaching someone to push through and comply with something even if they know it doesn't feel right is gaslighting people and only teaches them to ignore their bodies. I personally know several adults who cannot recognize when they are pushing themselves too hard, so are in a constant burnout cycle, which is terrible for their health and also their workplaces.”

“If they cannot do the task because it is at odds with what their brain and body can manage, then they are actually having a deeply unpleasant experience which will cause distress. Finding the just right challenge is more important than completing tasks mandated without regard to their uniqueness.”

“Consequences should flow naturally. Provide as much help as needed to get task done. And study the task, was it too hard? Too many steps? next time do the sequencing differently, and have an if/then plan that child anticipates eagerly.”

““Getting away with everything” is an extreme over exaggeration based on fear of being out of control. By giving people space to explore each individual task, look at the outcomes/ purpose of each task and exploring how each individual might approach the task differently, but still get to the same outcome. It allows for individualization and personalization.”

“Expectations need to be established when all parties are calm and alert”

“Is the task too hard, triggering, or emotionally disturbing to the student. Just because we think it is easy, it might not be easy for the student. Many of these children have gaps in learning or in ability. For example, it is like a kid that can run a 4 min mile, but cant walk to the mailbox. Just because they can do it in one setting, doesn't mean they can do it in all settings.”

“Let's take this moment by moment, task by task.”

“Ability to participate fluctuates. Flexibility is key to accessing safety.”

“Why do you think they are avoiding it?”

“It is a nonsensical argument that conflates invisible with imaginary. No one suggests that a wheelchair user should have to use the stairs because if we “let them out of this task they will think they can get away with everything”. I am AuDHD and identify as a disabled (within the social model paradigm) my very spiky profile means that some days things that were not a challenge the day before are all but impossible. All I learned from growing up around the mindset this quote is indicative of was self-loathing.

“Maybe they are not ready to do this task at this time. We can come back and try later. If we force someone to do something they are not ready for or do not have the correct energy match for we may induce trauma and a future avoidance of the task. If we wait and try when energy is regulated, there will be greater success and confidence will be boosted.”

“They can return to their task when they are regulated and in a state where they are ready.”

“Maybe we need to figure out the root cause of why they want to get out of the task- do they need sensory input? Is the work too hard? Is it the environment?”

“If a child feels safe and heard they are more open to learning and trying things”

We can't start the task until we need basic needs first.

“Our job as teachers and parents is to get curious around why that task created an unsafe feeling for the child in the first place. Once the child is assured you care the most about their feeling of safety and are in a regulated state, they may be willing to try the task in a new way that honors what didn't work for them the first time around (i.e. removing sensory triggers, trying the task in a different setting, reducing the number of problems, helping them get started etc.)”

“While I have pushed my kids to finish some tasks so that they are aware they can push through, I have learned that the energy necessary to do this can be very overwhelming. I have to trust that they can get the important things done and give them a chance to be successful with those.”

“Or it will teach the child that we respect their choices”

“Kids deserve breaks and maybe that's all they need. If they are always trying to escape the activities, maybe consider what they need to succeed. Can it be more fun, more sensory friendly, is it too difficult?”

“I would explain that forcing a student to complete a task when they are feeling uncomfortable makes them ignore what's going on inside their bodies and the long-term effects of this are huge.”

“When we can empathetically understand a child's capabilities, this thought is no longer an issue. We must understand that sometimes a child cannot complete the task required and that's ok. You really can push a child too far.”

“My experience with kids has been the opposite, when they’re allowed some agency they will be more invested in tasks. When we allow some breathing room children develop intrinsic motivation and will actually learn way more than they will during forced compliance.”

“That's very black and white thinking, and teaching our kids to critically think means modeling that every situation requires dynamic assessment/consideration.”

“If a child is not performing up to your expectations for a task, there is a reason. not finding that reason should be unacceptable, as continuing to ask them to do something they are not doing is simply not fair. the reasons may take time to figure out; they are likely multi-layered and complicated, but there is one resounding truth underneath it all: people do well when they can. We often have higher expectations of our children than we do of adults. they are under enormous pressure to "be good" -- if they are not meeting those expectations, it is because of big emotions, anxiety (very often the case), demand avoidance, unmet needs, lagging skills, executive function issues, undiagnosed/diagnosed learning differences or neurodivergence.”

“Does that work with you? Why should it be different with children?”

“I try to turn the question on them to put themselves in their shoes. “have you ever not wanted to do a task?” “How were you feeling?””

“Work out what the issue is with the task, can it be chained or scaffolded. Work out why and support kids to find way.”

“This is silly because as a life skill kids need to learn how to take a break from a task or control their learning order. (Note I said order, not control the learning objective) As an adult when I don’t want to do something – like clean the bathroom, I might leave that task, so to speak, and do everything else on my to do list first. I might turn on loud music or put on my audio book to get myself psyched up for cleaning that gross floor! It’s okay for children to learn the skill of how to get this hard or unpreferred task done. And it might not be sitting in a seat at the same moment as everyone else.”

“We can propose to ask help, if the task is too complicated. They also need to know that for some tasks we need more skills and knowledge to gain to get back and succeed at it.”

“If we do not understand why they feel the need to get out of the task, then we cannot know with certainty the best way to respond. We need to ask why (why do we feel the task needs to be prioritized, why is their behaviour of 'getting away' communicating that they are having difficulty with the task in the moment?)”

“If we push something while they are deeply dysregulated, we will add an additional risk for avoidance through a trauma response. If they have overwhelming negative feelings and neurophysiological responses every time they are forced to encounter something, they will associate it with those feelings and arousal state, further avoiding and potentially increasing the lifelong fear or panic of the task.”

“What's the actual point of this task? Is there any way we can meet in a way that honours their needs and advocacy??”

“Adjusting to needs shows we care and see the state they are in.”

“Why is this particular task important? Discernment and self-advocacy are skills that should be encouraged.”

“I understand the concern, but holding people to every task isn't about control it is about purpose. Our focus should be to focus on helping people understand why something matters instead of just enforcing it, we get stronger accountability, not less. If someone struggles, that's a cue to improve and support the process, not just tighten the rules. The effects can be catastrophic and induce such behaviours (distress). True compliance comes from ownership and ability to feel and be in control, not fear of “getting away” with something. It is a form of communication.”

“I heard that countless times last year as well. And I used to think this for years until I knew better. I would respond with questioning exactly what we are prioritizing when we teach a kid. I also talk about stress and how you can't learn when you're in that state.”

“Regulation before expectation. If we force compliance on our students than are they truly learning or just learning to comply.”

“Their body and behaviors is telling us something about this task is too hard right now. Let's adapt it or approach it from a different way.”

“When they feel safe and regulated they will be able to complete tasks, no one is able to learn in a dysregulated state”

“We should present the task in a different way that meets their needs.”

“Depending on how important said task is –and making choices if this is one the must be fulfilled. Helping the child work on the task in a manageable way. Breaking it down into smaller parts, helping with the task (co-regulating and supporting), adapting the task, helping the child to understand what they need and support their understanding.”

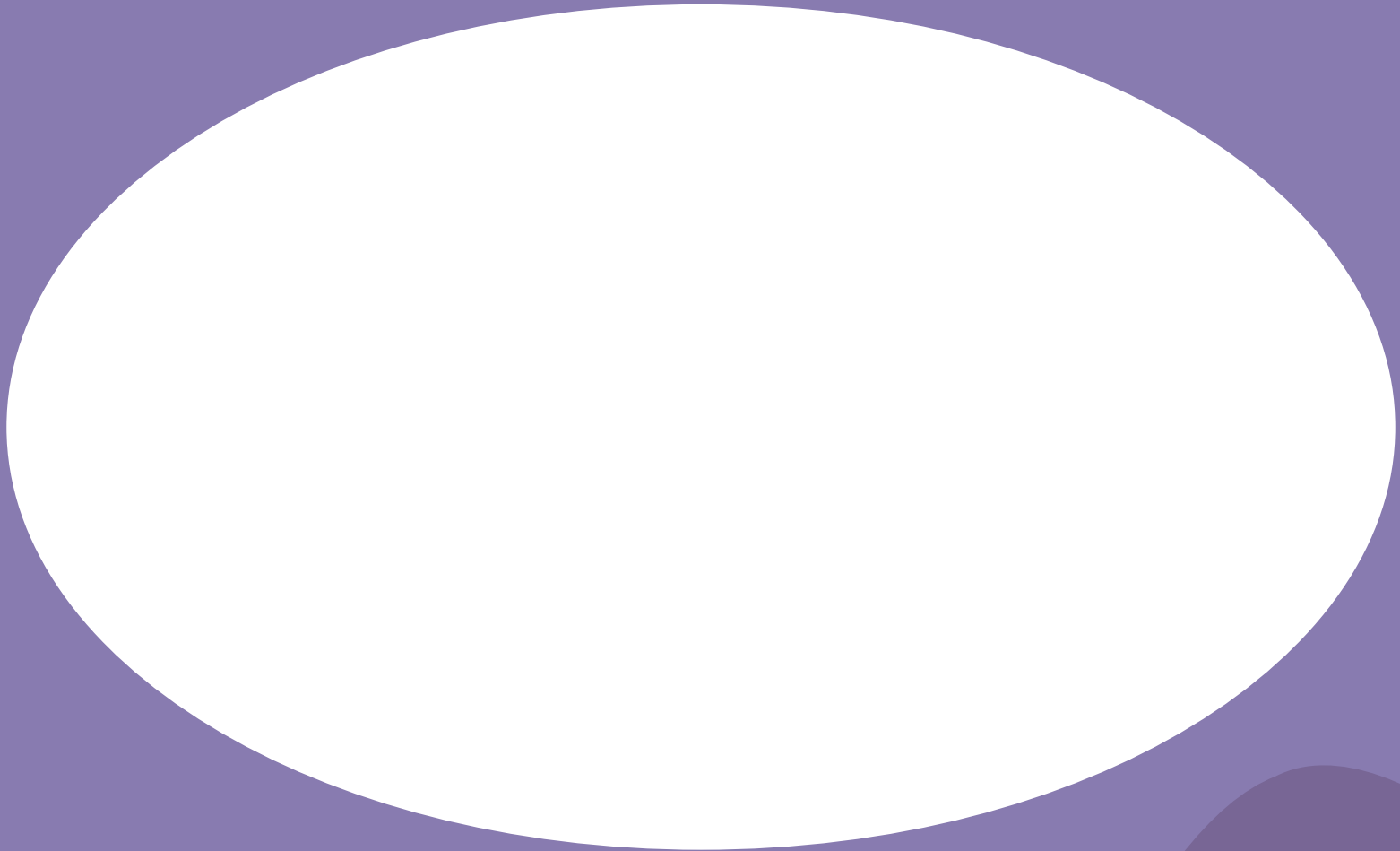
“We’re not letting them get away with it, we’re helping them succeed. The expectation can remain, but we may adjust the timing, support, or structure so they can actually complete it successfully.”

“Is this task truly essential right now? If it is, we can support it differently. If it’s not urgent, we can pause and return when success is more likely.”

“Instead of a binary perspective: they either do it, or they don’t—there are lots of options on the continuum of support. We can only model and teach them skills when they aren’t feeling flooded or threatened, so let’s consider scaffolding, cooperation, tag-teaming, task sharing, negotiation, compromise, choosing another aspect of the task, or the option to postpone what feels daunting until they are fed, rested, available.”

“We need to understand what the barrier is to completing this task – to quote ROSS GREEN ‘kids do well if they can’, everyone would prefer to feel successful, lets se how we can support achieving success so they are more likely to want to engage and experience that feeling again.”

REFLECTION



Want to support interoception communication?





Question #5

Responding to Naysayers (third): some people resist moving away from compliance. How would you respond to this statement?

“If we don’t enforce strict compliance, they’ll never learn to be tough and build resilience.”



"I pick my battles and enforce strict compliance for safety or things that involve a big team depending on my child. That way they understand when they will have time to choose how to do things and when they will have to spend energy they don't always feel they have."

"Children learn all skills through play- especially being confident, brave, and the ability to "try again""

"Adults are able to accommodate themselves as we need, we need to teach our students the same"

"That is not what builds resilience...it is being allowed to feel safe enough to struggle at your own pace with a concept. That does not happen when the brain is being overwhelmed with the task of compliance."

"Feeling uncomfortable all the time and expected to meet our norms is only stressing the child out more and will likely lead to behaviors. They are learning skills to deal with frustration when we don't force compliance."

"Compliance, force, pressure etc. is disempowering for a child. It assumes they need it so the child may start to internalise that they are bad and need to be pushed and pressured so they lose touch with their authentic self and their natural abilities to become the best version of themselves. It's more likely to create a false self and spend the rest of their lives battling with a fierce inner critic pushing and pressuring themselves into adulthood. Causing things like stress, anxiety, depression, addictions, shame, low self esteem, relationship issues etc."

“Self-motivation builds resilience and for that to happen we need to let the individual learn in safety at their own pace. Everyone is trying their best at the end of the day.”

Resilience is not founded in compliance, but in understanding and support. In one study of children who had experienced abuse, those who did not develop long-term resilience were those who were not supported when they confided in someone. Those who were resilient after abuse were those who had been given adequate support by caregivers and professionals. The support was the only difference between the 2 groups.”

“Compliance in itself can be traumatic if it entails dismissal, invalidation, and lack of support.”

“Our kids show us resilience every day. Dealing with all that feels wrong in the world for them. Building strategies that help our kids deal with things will leave them with more energy to be resilient to daily demands as opposed to them not being able to deal with anything because it all feels too much.”

“My idea of being tough and resilient is actually about standing up for what we know is right and doing the hard work that comes with that. I don't think being tough and resilient is about doing what we're told to do without question. That sounds like weak and compliant to me and that's not what I want my kid to learn.”

“Just existing is resilience when you have a disability. Life will be harder for them, and we don't have to add to it. They'll probably build more resilience from seeing that they moved through a challenge with support and gained confidence.”

“But many of my students in these situations don't need to be tough. They are building resilience every time they interact with the world in whatever manner they can. Most of my students will always be dependent on care/support from others. Pushing them past their "breaking point" solves nothing and sets up negative interactions. I understand that they need to be able to live in society that won't take their challenges/vulnerabilities into consideration, so giving them some grace in what we expect can be the turning point in how that student perceives the world they live in.”

“Everyone learns differently and has different reactions to how they respond to instruction. Building resilience isn't through strict compliance. Resilience comes from an internal desire to do well and persevere due to feeling supported and heard.”

“Resilience includes the ability to make choices, make mistakes, fail, succeed and every spectrum of experience and be able to return to an emotionally balanced place after the highs and lows. Rigid compliance robs them of their agency and self esteem to experience their own resilience.”

“They are building resilience just being at school. Giving them positive school experiences and strategies to get some work done will only help.”

“What's resilience-building about negating a child's needs? Resilience is nurtured through coregulation, unconditional love, structure, and safety.”

“We push compliance so hard it is shortening time we are able to work with students and they have more work, it overwhelms them.”

“They will learn grit and resilience by feeling competent at skills step by step. Sometimes, we need to slow things down to build grit one step at a time.”

“This thinking can be especially dangerous when working with neurodivergent children. Even if we don't mean to, educators/specialists/parents with this attitude might be teaching children not to trust or listen to their bodies needs, which can have devastating long term effects on neurodivergent folks over the course of their lives.”

““Your child is facing so many challenges every single day! ...(list out some challenges)..”What if we help him feel validated and seen right now and make his day a little bit easier?””

“How about try a curiosity and connection lens and see the difference. Hard when someone was raised that way shifting the mindset and often in education teachers have little training around this and are scared to take a leap of faith”

“We build resilience by being supported through tough situations, when they trust us, we can help them to understand boundaries”

“Resilience is built in safe harbours not storms. Children build resilience through knowing they have someone who can support and guide them through the difficult things not by being forced or abandoned”

“If we teach them their experience and opinion doesn't matter we are setting them up for negative experiences later in life.”

“Enforcing strict compliance will just force them to mask their emotions and feelings and disconnect from themselves. Respecting the person will allow them to build their sense of self, their interoceptive awareness and be equipped to advocate for themselves and their needs.”

“Kids have their entire life to build resilience and to learn how to “be tough”. Kids can only learn these things when adults meet their needs and help them build up their skills. By giving kids autonomy and control over their choices, they will learn that their voice matters and that inherently builds resilience as they learn that they can do hard things with support. Only then will kids want to try things on their own.””

“Building strength and resilience long term comes from learning, with co-regulators initially, how to manage big feelings and the world around them, setting them up for self confidence and a genuine strength that comes with knowing how to feel safe and acknowledged to better navigate themselves in the words.”

“Students may not be encouraged to feel what their body is telling them. That will build resilience.”

“Resilience is built through trusting relationships. When a student struggles, I want to be there with them. Modeling strategies to help support them through it.”

“Consequences should flow naturally. If they don't clean up the game, they can't play it next time. Help with any big behaviors. Being tough and having resilience is important. Ensure that compliance is only used with a few , health and safety based tasks.”

“Resilience is not developed through fear and compliance.”

“Resilience is built over time by overcoming challenges. Each challenge is different based on different neurotypes. We must be aware of the difference between assuming resilience building and feeding into masking and compensatory behaviours that add to long term trauma”

“When you meet the student where they are at in the moment, use simple choices within the desired tasks”

“Resilience is built through relationships, empowerment, and confidence. We need children to feel comfortable to be able to take a risk. Answering a questions may be a risk for a student, they need to feel safe first.”

“Let's be curious and talk about what "being tough" means.”

“Resilience is built when i take the time to pause, hear the child out, help them understand their needs and work with them in adapting tasks/routines to low demand. As the children succeed in this approaches, they discover what is helpful to them and gives them a voice, experience in self-advocacy and aren't these the characteristics or actions that we want in someone who is resilient?”

“They will also not learn important skills such as independence, free will, or natural consequences.”

“If they only experience force, pressure and disregard of their feelings, how can they develop a sense of confidence and wellbeing that is necessary for resilience through tough times?”

“True strength and resilience looks like a person who understands themselves and makes choices to support themselves and those they care for. It is being able to speak up when something isn't right in the way you or others are being treated. Resilience and toughness do not mean ignoring your body and its needs and the needs of others, or keeping quiet when something isn't right. Compliance based learning has the risk of teaching people to ignore instead of to understand themselves and others.”

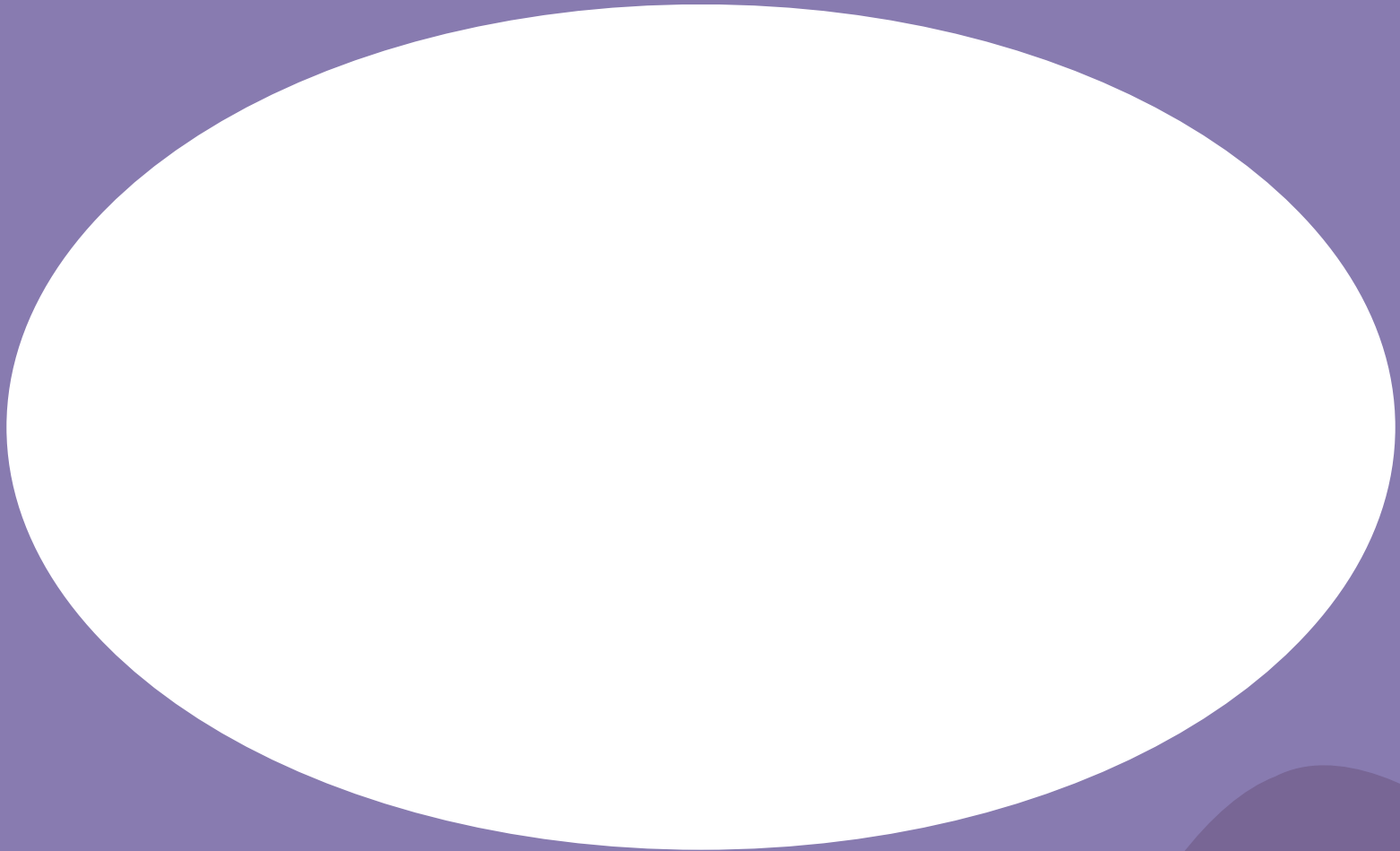
“Resilience is built through trial and error. If they simply comply with everything how is resilience being built?”

“Children don't become resilient or strong by being forced to suppress their feelings or “tough it out.” They become strong by feeling safe to be vulnerable. They truly will need to learn to do difficult things at times, but this doesn't mean they need to do exactly what adults want them to all the time. When they truly will benefit from doing difficult things, we need to help ensure they have the resources they truly need. Learning how to break difficult tasks down, how to face challenges including asking for support when needed, is foundational to true resilience.”

“Permissiveness doesn't build resilience either, because it leaves children without the anchor of adult leadership. Resilience grows in the space between support and stretch. Children can work in this space when they have safe, trusting relationships with adults they can rely on for gentle challenge, adults who offer care and guidance, not control.”

“True resilience comes from feeling safe and supported, not from being forced into compliance.”


REFLECTION



Want to support interoception learning
in non speaking clients?

AOA American Occupational Therapy Association
Approved Provider

Early Communication & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

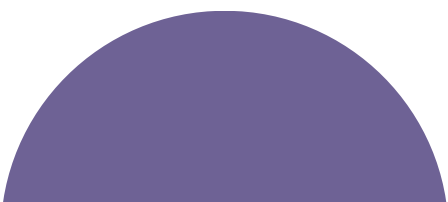
Anna Vander Haeghe
BScOT

Question #6



6. Please complete this sentence in relation to compliance:

**“I used to think compliance
-----, now I know
-----.”**



"I used to think compliance was necessary to achieve the goal. Now I know that the outcome is the most important and there are a lot of ways that it can be accomplished."

"I used to think compliance was following all the rules, now I know it's co-creating the rules to keep everyone safe and well"

"I used to think compliance was good for us all, now I know we need to question the trauma it causes and embrace other ways of being."

"I used to think compliance was how we learn, now I know that it is how we learn to not rock the boat, not actually how we develop."

"Was saving me time and effort/ It derails people from feeling safe and ultimately has high costs to our relationship and their long-term health which takes much more time and effort to resolve"

"I used to think compliance was necessary for classroom management, now I know collaboration can be used."

"I used to think compliance meant respect and good behavior, now I know it often means fear and disconnection"

"I used to think compliance was possible. Now I know it's a dangerous myth."

"I used to think compliance was effective, now I know it's more detrimental."

"I used to think compliance was really important, if the teacher says do it you need to. That's how school was when I was a kid. Now I see that this is a barrier to participation in school for some kids and isn't what we want to see in adults. Sometimes people with more power tell me to do something and I need to be able to express an alternative viewpoint in a professional manner. Depending on where this conversation went, I might talk about mental health outcomes for autistic adults and potentially rates of abuse for autistic individuals. I used to think compliance was important, now I know it's better to support people to have agency and that it's safer for them to be able to express their ideas."

"I used to think compliance works, now I know it does not."

"Helped kids pay attention, compliance takes away their capacity to learn"

"Means creating boundaries...that means creating limits and limiting the child of discovering the world around them."

"Was a way to show that the children were listening to me and was a way of achieving goals, now I know it is a behaviorist approach that is masking and not allowing the children I work with to make genuine progress towards their goals was teaching skills and independence, helping children develop. Now I know it is ignoring their underlying needs, not seeing them as a 'whole person', and can cause significant distress, while not providing the opportunity for them to learn and develop."

"I used to think compliance was all parenting was, now I know compliance is only one parenting style and not the one for me."

"I used to think compliance was necessary to raise a child that was a good listener and was making good choices, now I know connection is more important than compliance."

"I used to think compliance was following normed expectation, now I know that is shutting down voices and taking away autonomy."

"I used to think I had to comply in a compliance driven setting, but now I know I don't. Now I have ways to explain a non-compliance based approach."

"Was needed, the only thing I knew, now I know that compliance is more about the adult not meeting the child's needs. There are many things that can be done to help a student participate but they do take more time and are harder to do then just demand compliance (especially in the beginning)."

"I used to think compliance meant the child was doing well, now I know it can mean they're overwhelmed, masking, or simply feel unable to express their authentic self."

"I used to think compliance reflected that I, the adult, was in charge and steering the ship and that this was necessary for kids to progress, learn, and grow; now I know that I can share the autonomy and decision-making with kids to help them feel supported, cared for, and empowered to grow in the ways that they are ready to grow."

"I used to think compliance meant doing what is required, now I know it means doing what someone else wants just because they want you to."

"I used to think compliance was success, now I know understanding is success"

"I used to think compliance was key, now I know better."

"I used to think compliance meant doing what you are told to do no matter what, now I know compliance doesn't get the results I seek"

"Was a necessary part of life skills, how important child autonomy and regulation is"

"I used to think compliance was important, now I know that empowering children with an authentic voice in their choices, leads to a well-rounded, emotionally mature person with the skills to cope with whatever life might throw at them."

"I used to think compliance was a choice, now I know better. It's dismissing and harmful."

"I used to think compliance was the goal, now I know that regulation and safety are."

"Would make life more controlled and structured but now I know it causes fear, insecurity and distress and we miss out on so much."

"Was the same for every kid and was a must
It looks different for different kids and isn't a set thing"

“Was necessary; it is performance and a barrier to authentic experience.”

“I used to think compliance meant I was doing the right thing and good behaviour, now I know differently and that it means I can be compromising my integrity.”

“Built skills....building awareness and understanding and supporting foundational skills is better for self-esteem and long-term results”

“I used to think compliance made things easier, now I know I was right. And I don't value easy as much as I value "authentic””

“I used to think compliance showed respect, now I know it's not healthy.”

“Equalled respect, it is an indicator of whether or not a child's needs have been met, his environment has been set up to meet his needs, and he has been given the tools he needs to meet the demand placed on him.”

“Meant doing what your told, compliance is when your body and mind are regulated to complete a task with understanding”

“Is finishing their work, listening to the student and helping them learn it or finish it in a way that works for the student.”

“I used to think compliance was a positive aspect of learning but now I know that this does not meet everyone's needs, empower them or help them to flourish.”

"I used to think compliance meant kids respect what adults say, now I know that adults need to listen and respect what kids are saying (spoken and unspoken) with curiosity! Curiosity is key!"

"I used to think compliance was a positive aspect of learning but now I know that this does not meet everyone's needs, empower them or help them to flourish."

"I used to think that compliance was important so the adult could be in control of a situation, now I know that when children have secure attachments and feel safe and comfortable they will do their best to comply."

"I used to think compliance was the way to keep out of trouble, now I know it broke my mental health and robbed me of my authenticity."

"I used to think compliance was necessary to raise independent and productive children, now I know that it actually squashes self-expression and can cause significant nervous system trauma and anxiety."

"I used to think compliance meant the child was doing well, now I know it can mean they're overwhelmed, masking, or simply feel unable to express their authentic self."

"I used to think compliance meant "progress", now I know it means "power over"."

REFLECTION

Want to learn more about how to support pee and poop needs from the inside out? ?



AOTA American Occupational Therapy Association
Approved Provider

Toileting 2.0 & Interoception


Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L


Sahana Baker-Malone
OTD, OTR/L, PRPC

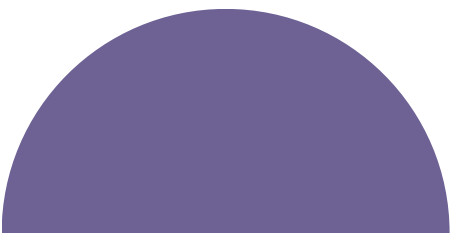


Question #7

Responding with Curiosity (Scenario 1): How would you respond to this situation?

A child repeatedly blurts out answers in class.

Blurting is often framed as impulsive or disruptive, yet it can reveal inner experiences such as regulation needs, communication preferences, or excitement to engage. These responses show how community members interpret blurting through curiosity rather than control.



“How else does a child feel heard throughout the day? Are there anxiety provoking aspects to a child's day that we're not yet recognizing? Where is their need for escape coming from?”

“First: I hear how smart you are in knowing all the answers, I wonder if any of our friends are as smart as you. Let's see if they can answer the next question right. You can help me check to make sure their answer is correct.”

“I would be curious about the child. Do they have any difficulties or differences in executive function and impulse control, and neurodevelopmental differences (ADHD/Autism, etc.) that means that they are not aware of or in control in their 'blurting out'. How old are they - is it a developmental difference or reasonable for their age while they are learning to wait, take turns, await a response from the teacher to give their answer? A social skills difference? Is it a topic or subject or discussion they are passionate about, want to be involved in, want to share their knowledge, etc.? Is this happening in every class or just some, and why in some classes and not in others - because of a lack of interest or engagement in less interesting subjects, different peers from class to class, different teachers and their differing responses to the child (supportive or admonishing)? I wouldn't confront the child in the classroom in front of peers - demanding compliance to rules that they may not be able to follow in their excitement, shaming them in front of peers, or crushing their spark for the subject or topic. I would find a quiet, calm, private time to be curious with the child to say that they are obviously very interested, excited, and knowledgeable about the subject/topic today, and explore that with them. I would also explore how they could let others who may also be as passionate about answering the chance to also give answers - in a collaborative way with the child so they can come up with some ideas on how others can also share in the classroom. I would look to find a way to meet the child's need to share their knowledge - have them do a short

presentation or show a project to the class where they can be asked questions to answer by the class, or that they ask the questions and the class answers them. Build on their obvious strengths. Never try to shut them down or comply with rules – the risk of damaging supportive relationships that the child's desire to learn could be risked and may have negative consequences on their self-esteem and future engagement. Over time, develop strategies to support the child to not be so impulsive and share the discussion with others – collaboratively with the child, and reflecting with them with what is working and what doesn't. Supporting their development and learning, while also understanding the child will always call out the answers in class, but maybe just less than they used to which is ok – not set a blanket policy of none which could be and probably will be impossible to achieve without a punitive consequence for compliance with a 'zero tolerance' approach.”

“I wonder if the student understands the rules or expectations in this classroom around answering questions? Do they need a visual reminder on their desk to help them raise their hand before answering? Does this student understand how if they always blurt out answers, other students who want to participate will not have a turn to share what they are thinking? Is this student aware of the other students in the room? If not, do they need help with visual scanning, spatial awareness and orientation, and proprioception? How is their impulse control in general? Perhaps we need to practice some of these skills, along with perspective-taking, to help them out.”

“Excitement to share the answer – use sticks to call on, or individual whiteboards so all may share their answer.”

“Love your enthusiasm but we use our hand, so we don't steal someone's thinking or learning.”

“Would hope not to reduce their enthusiasm thinking there must be others beside me who wonder about why so many people are holding back when a question is asked? It can seem like a very long time – the thinking time – whiteboard or writing individual answers is also helpful – helps to get a variation and encourages contribution and the risk taking of giving an answer that is difficult for some people. If problematic wonder about learning to whisper the answer perhaps to a soft toy – or might even be some activities opportunities for people to whisper in pairs.”

“I ask a question of my class, give them all time to come up with ideas with their partner and then pick 2 pairs to share first, essentially cold calling, but with prewarning that they will be asked. Once those pairs have shared then I open it up to the rest. Gets every pair thinking and ensures children know who will be asked first.”

“Providing student with a visual support on their table to assist them in their self monitoring skills i.e., do I know what to do, can I ask a peer for help, do I need to put my hand up for help from the teacher, what can I do to help shift my focus.”

“Demonstrating a skill to a student, providing encouragement and support at every stage and build in messages about struggle, frustration and error being part of the process.”

“Provided background music for a student to provide a calming environment.”

“A student in a self-contained class was expected to write by copying sentences provided by the teacher to earn their favorite Disney Character—the student was not following the plan and refused to write. I copied the favorite Disney Character all over the paper and asked the student to write about the character. The student now writes “long and strong” with comfort character on the paper instead of earned to comply.”

“Elopement--what is happening in these spaces that makes the child feel the need to leave? Bathroom--I wonder if the school nurse has checked in with parents about possible medical reasons for this? Blurting out--I wonder if this child needs to be heard?”

“I would thank the child for participating and ask who agrees with their answer. And then ask if there were other answers or perspectives. I would let the child go to the bathroom. Maybe add in a note delivery too that needs a reply (planned with a colleague) to encourage them to get back and also to wide their feelings of relational safety. Eloping is hard. There are so many reasons behind it. Finding out what’s going on or could be going on would be my first thought. Sensory? Boring? Something scary? Something they would rather be doing?”

“Maybe the child has great ideas but has difficulty remembering them because they forget quickly - Mmm could you write them down? Type them? Maybe even use speech to text in a document? The teacher could give the whole class time to do this.”

“Acknowledge their enthusiasm for answering questions. Ask them to ask me a question. Practice listening first. Practice letting others speak. Do not punish or make them feel bad.”

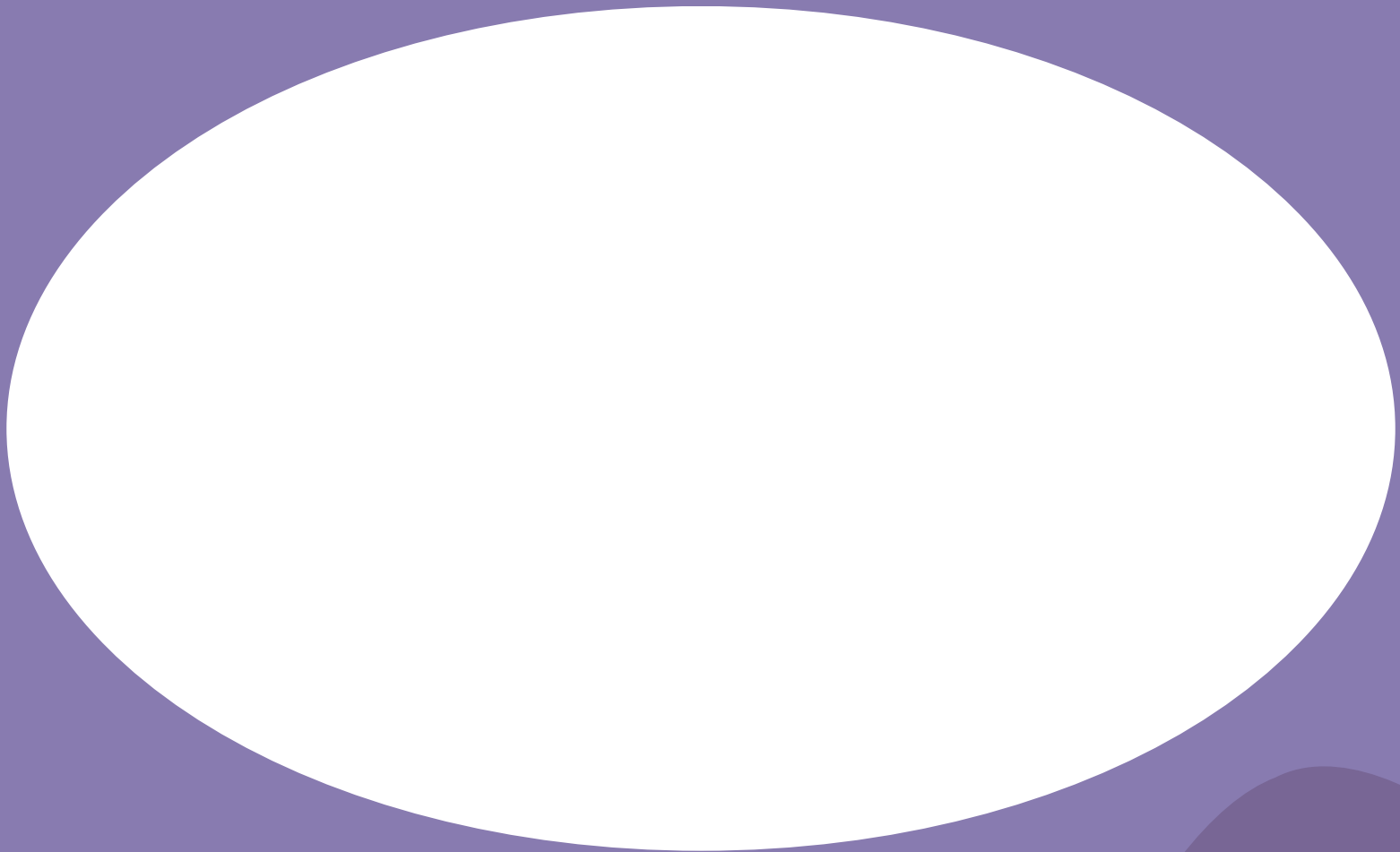
“Each of these behaviors are expressing a young person's needs. It is my job to figure out what those needs are through conversations with the young person and through observations. A child repeatedly blurting out answers could be from a various list of why they are doing it (they are afraid of forgetting their important ideas, they are really focused on the conversation and are passionate about it....).”

“I know you want to share your ideas and can't wait to voice them. It can feel hard to wait but I know you can do it. If you want, you can wait til I call you or you can count to ten before raising your hand. We need to share the space with our friends.”

“The impulsivity is probably causing the child to blurt out answers, I would have a conversation with them about what is happening with their brain when they blurt and work out ways like writing/ drawing/ scribbling the answer on a white board stuck on their desk”

“In a one on one setting, ask the child why they are not raising their hand. Is it because they forget to raise their hand? Because they are afraid they'll forget the answer if they don't say it right away? Because they are worried that they won't be called on if they raise their hand, and it feels good to give the right answer? If the child can give a reason why, work with the child in an age-appropriate way to develop a possible strategy to address the situation. For example, if the child is worried they'll forget the answer, perhaps they can write it down. If the child cannot give a reason why they're blurting out, that's ok. Come up with some strategies that might meet an unmet need or develop an undeveloped skill and try them, while continuing to explore the "why" as time goes on and you get to know each other better.”

REFLECTION

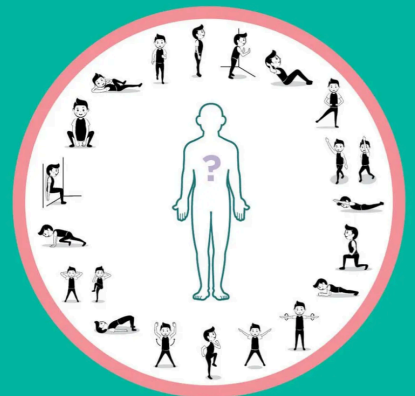


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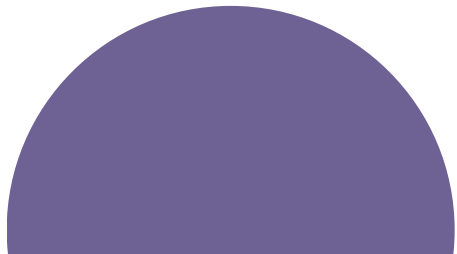
Question #8



Responding with Curiosity (Scenario 2): How would you respond to this situation?

A child asks to use the bathroom many, many times a day.

Repeated bathroom requests are frequently treated as avoidance or manipulation. Here are the ways our community explores what might be happening beneath the surface through a variety of lenses.



“As a life skills teacher a lot of bathrooming issues were present in my classroom. Learning about interoception helped me understand just how difficult bathroom could be. So in that situation, I think I would just examine the circumstances in which that’s happening. I would take them to the bathroom to see if they really are going. And then determine if it wasn’t different need that they were trying to meet- for example needing a movement break.”

“Bathroom escape: I would observe what’s happening before the request, then explore ways to provide alternatives to what the child appears to need (quiet? break? just a walk? etc.)”

“I noticed you are heading to the bathroom a lot, is your body telling you to get moving or is it sending signals to go to the bathroom?”

“I was that child (and teen and young adult). I understand that there is the possibility that the curiosity should relate to possible avoidance and whether the child is uncomfortable in the classroom or is experiencing anxiety etc. (all possible) but I think it is incredibly important to ensure there is not a physical problem at base. I was 40 before an incidental finding of a Horseshoe kidney explained a lifelong need to urinate several times an hour and an early history of UTIs.”

Ask the student if there is something about the bathroom that is helping them learn or if it giving them a break when the classroom is too much. Just asking them to tell me more about this or just not trying to fill the void with talking has given so much more information and opportunities to learn more about my students.”

“I wonder if this student uses the bathroom as a place to regulate since the classroom might be too much and if they may not have the language or ability to ask for a break. I also wonder if the student is interoception is intense.”

"I wonder what the toilet trip is telling us about how their body is feeling can they tell you after how they are feeling. Curiously I'd be wondering can they feel how it feels to empty all the way. Have they had a recent accident so scared of that feeling."

It could be needing a sensory break (my child's teacher assumed this and allowed it), but it could also be a physical issue (my child had a bladder capacity of 40mL for a while - normal would have been 230mL- so any sip of water meant multiple toilet breaks - the teacher had no idea this was a thing and had ignored parental requests to encourage regular fluid intake to improve bladder volume)....."

"Fight/flight may be activated causing an increase in the release of adrenaline. This can cause the bladder to constrict which creates an urge to urinate. Spinal galant reflex may not be integrated and the pressure of the back of the chair may cause the feeling of needing to urinate. These were things our daughter experienced due to high anxiety"

"I had this very issue with an Autistic student last year. I noticed he went often, but so quickly. Sometimes, I'd peek out in the hallway and watch him get to the bathroom door and turn right back around. I guessed that he was misreading interoceptive cues, and saw a great deal of anxiety in him. We worked on regulating activities and trying not to increase his stress around the bathroom. The less anxiety he felt, the less he'd ask to go to the washroom. I looped his family in and he was taken to the doctor to ensure there was nothing physical to look after. It continued- we'd practice our body scans when he'd ask to go, and always told him he could go if he needed to. He always said he wasn't feeling anxious, but would name body cues that might indicate anxiety. I suggested that his family might want to speak with his pediatrician about his anxiety, but I was quickly shut down, as his family said they would not medicate their child, so if it isn't physical he'll have to learn to cope. We do what we can for our students"

“Whatever the reason is, while I try to get to the bottom, the student will never be NOT allowed to use the bathroom break. Build a connection with the student and inquire if the student is feeling anything in their body, where. If walking down the hallway helps. Would they want to volunteer to get something, call someone from another location in the school and embed movement break. Is there anything in the classroom that’s bothersome- lighting, sound level, cluttered walls, seating not comfortable.... And if so, how can we make it better. More than anything, I would want to earn the student’s trust, make them feel seen, heard, and safe; regulated, build a partnership to problem solve.”

“What they need a break from and what might be some other options for them to reset? Or what might be overwhelming in the classroom?”

“Check environmental factors.”

“Instead of assuming they’re trying to get out of the task (which is also valid) I’d be curious- is it interoception based, anxiety related, needing to move their body, sick?”

“I would respond by gathering the child's voice about this need (through their preferred means of expression, and in a way that they feel comfortable with). Exploring the 'why's' - Could it be the need for a social/sensory/movement/brain break? Could it be a trauma response to feeling unable to engage in the activity? Could it be a sensory interoception need? Could it be that the child is unwell? Then work with the child to explore ways to support them.”

REFLECTION

Want to learn more about interoception,
emotions and emotion words?



Emotion Language & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L



Rachael Thompson
OT BSc



Alexithymia & Interoception



Kelly Mahler



David Gray-Hammond

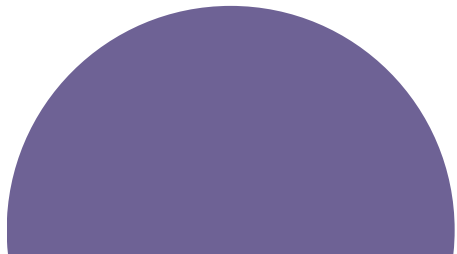
Question #9



Responding with Curiosity (Scenario 3): How would you respond to this situation?

A child frequently tries to run out of (elope from) the cafeteria or grocery store.

Eloping is often met with fear or heightened enforcement, but it can be a powerful communicator of distress, overwhelm, or unmet needs. These perspectives highlight how curiosity helps us understand the “why” behind running, and how to support safety without pressure.



"I see that you ran out quite fast, before we could talk about it. I can imagine it might be because of something happening inside your body. What do you think was happening inside your body? How does your body feel now that it is in a different environment? How could we work on telling me before you run, so that I am not worried about your safety when you were on your own? Let's work on this together, I would love to understand"

"Sensory, sensory, sensory! I truly believe so much more is happening that we don't understand as supports. Let's look at it from a different lens."

"Check the environment, how busy it is, how much noise is there, what is the visual environment look like around them, how loud is the heat/air conditioner, what type of lighting is in the room. What students are in there, are they noisy, smelly, etc. What smells are in the room that bother the student, etc."

"I meet with someone each week who craves autonomy and doesn't typically feel safe at school. I actively look for ways to signal safety to them by allowing them to move, to choose their activity in collaboration, to use interest-based topics, to choose the mode of response, and to have the freedom to say "no," or "not yet," when I suggest something. I have noticed that they are able to tell me when they are ready to work on their goals and this approach helps them have a space that actually feels safe at school."

"Students have access to a calm down quiet area that they can self-select to use at any point during the day. They do need to make sure only one person is in the space at a time."

"Why do they feel the need to run away from the environments? Are they escaping from the environment and seeking a safe space. Why? What do they need?"

"I wonder what in the cafeteria the child is trying to run away from? Is it too loud, too bright? Are they bothered by the smells?"

"I notice that you frequently run out of the cafeteria, can you tell me about that? What happens in your body when you want to run?"

"I'd wonder what it was about the cafe or grocery store that was eliciting such a flight reaction and why their nervous system was so dysregulated. I'd be curious with the child and consider sensory issues such as food smells, noises, bright lights, crowds of people, cold freezer sections, perhaps having to be contained in a 'cart' or feel overwhelmed by choice or feel trapped/ coerced to behave in a certain way. I'd wonder if they needed"

"We encourage the students to enter the same room as the activity and be somewhere nearby, and they are free to join, watch, or leave at any time."

"I used to work at a camp for children in foster care. There were only a few rules at camp: Be respectful, be safe, be courageous, and try new things. We maintained a schedule of activities throughout the day. One day, at the end of the week, a girl in my cabin decided she did not want to leave the lake to change and get ready for dinner. Staff rules require 2 adults with the kids at any given moment, so we called for help. For about an hour after the end of lake time, we just hung out with her at the lake, while maintaining the expectation that lake time was over and reminded her that dinner was underway. We empathized with her desire to be in the lake, as it was the last opportunity for lake time, but we had to remind her that no one else was in the lake, she needed to eat eventually, and that the talent show would be starting soon. Eventually she was willing to leave the lake, and we tried really hard to help it be on her terms. I am really grateful that everyone on staff had the mindset of the child's safety and joy at the top of their priorities, not her compliance."

"I would make the time to connect with this child so I become a safe and trusted connection to them. I would connect with the people that know him/her best. I would spend time observing, asking questions to find out with curiosity truly what is bothering them. I would see the eloping behavior just as a way of communicating to me, "something is not working, can you help me, can you give me a voice in front of others so they can see what is wrong? can you help others interpret this behavior, I am trying to let them know that something is not right, something is not working"

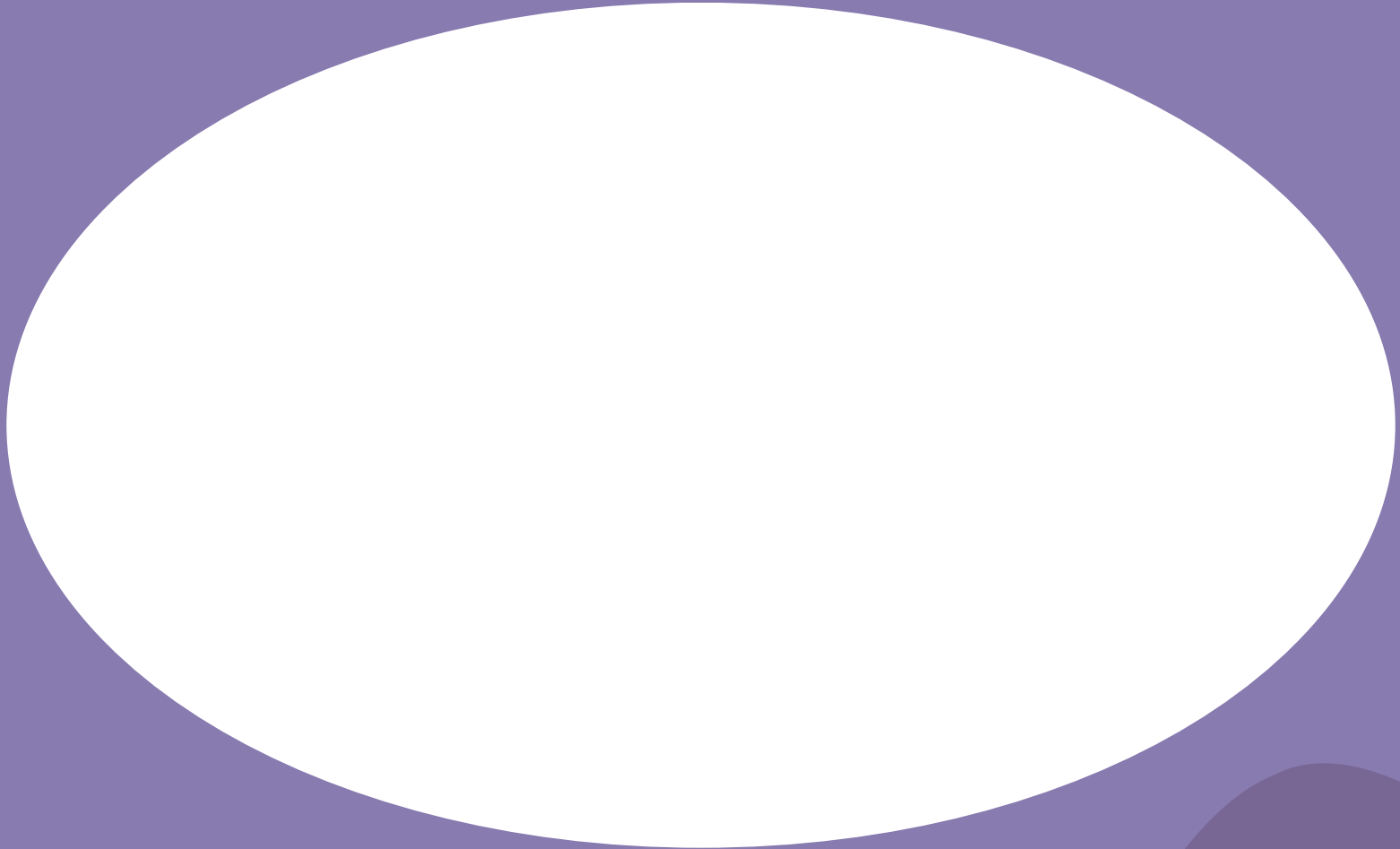
"Observe without judgment: I see you covering your ears and looking toward the door when it gets loud. Wonder aloud: I wonder if the noise, smells, or crowd make your body feel uncomfortable. Invite communication: What could help make this space feel easier for you? Do you want to sit near the edge, wear your headphones, or take a quick break before you eat?"

"I see you like to run, when/where else do you like to run? I wonder how your body feels in the cafeteria? I notice it is loud in there, what do you notice? I notice it smells in the cafeteria, what do you notice? I see that the kids are crowded at the tables, where would you eat lunch if you could pick your spot? Show me what you have in your lunch, what part is your favorite?"

"I would be curious as to why - what were the conditions or factors that caused the child to want to remove themselves from the environment (sensory, lighting, crowds, noise, smells, etc. Curious as to what they may have needed in that environment, or need to have a break from that environment. I'd be curious about what different situation would be needed for the child to access a cafeteria, or if they need to - and why are they continually leaving? Is it because they are being made to return? Or are they taking movement/sensory breaks from the environment to cope with it?"

"Makes me wonder what they are trying to get away from. My first thought is the noise so noise-canceling headphones?"

REFLECTION



Want an affirming approach to feeding?

PART ONE

ARFID, Feeding Challenges & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

Naureen Hunani
RD

PART TWO

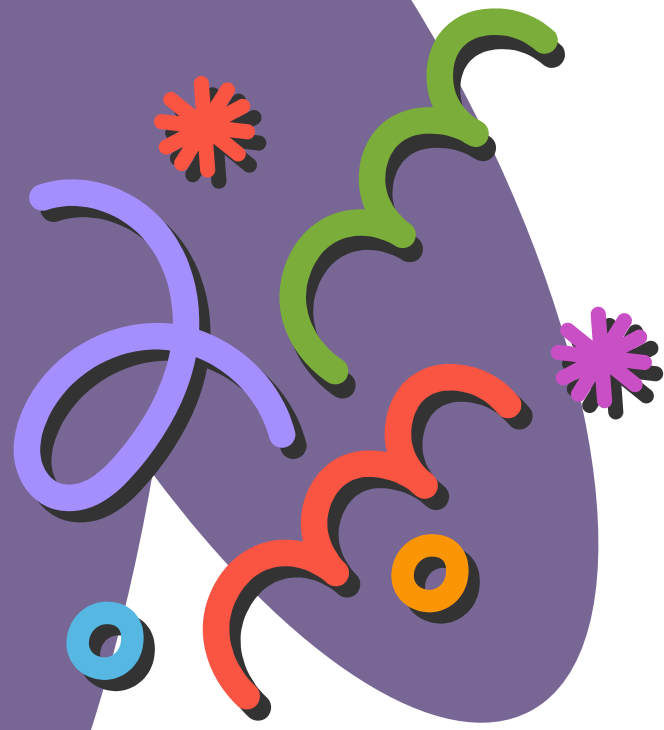
ARFID, Feeding Challenges & Interoception



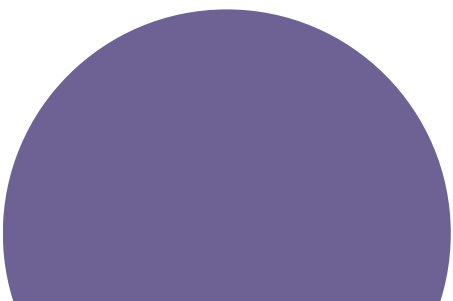
Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

Naureen Hunani
RD

Question #10



What's one example of how you've provided structure and held expectations in a way that didn't rely on compliance?



“Minimization, getting brain to use both hemispheres and work together to achieve task”

Visual choice board that the pupils have contributed their ideas/preferences to, to select from when they have finished their task so they do not have to feel rushed or sit and wait if finished sooner than others.”

“Build a strong relationship first. Then students will more naturally want the structure and expectations of being part of a trusting relationship.”

“I often allow a child to help build their schedule with me so they know what to expect and have a say in how they want to have things done. I also let the child know what is a "must do" and what is a "want to" but if a child is really struggling to do the must do, i often allow them to do less than was initially expected.”

“A child bullying another child. First attend to the child who is being bullied to say what is being said is not a reflection of the child’s worth and hold that knowing firmly. Then be curious towards the child that is bullying how are they feeling and why they are behaving that way. What is their intention. When the child who was bullying is regulated use that moment to offer teaching for new skills when they feel that way. Then facilitate a repair between the children.”

“Through pediatric OT with Montessori ingrained in the session for children I treat. Play for children and adults is essential for curiosity and enthusiasm in trying new things plus increases enjoyment most of the time.”

“Using visual schedules, first/then supports, and predictable routines while still offering choice within the expectation.”

“One way to organise a task is to provide many options for completing it. For example, if there's a task that requires writing a poem about autumn that includes specific things like adjectives, fronted adverbials, or whatever, it's possible to keep the criteria the same but engage each child in their preferred way - writing it like a rap song, using idiosyncratic language (like "sparkle noise" for fireworks), ask for original work or choose from a list of phrases, using a tray of items they can touch and hold for inspiration, etc. Children are more likely to engage if they feel they can accomplish something, it's interesting, and they have some choices.”

“Ages 2-4 for my son: I wrote social stories for my son about a little boy who made his own choices about the color of paint and stickers on his bedroom walls, the bedcovers, and socks - things that were already fun for him. Everything was just his height so he could reach it - the toys, books, clothes, bed, even the blinds string to adjust the sunlight coming in. The boy in the story learned how to change his own sheet and comforter on his bed in case of accidents. He learned how to wash his hands and use the hamper. At age 3, I setup a stack of pull ups next to a stack of underwear in the closet and a bidet on the toilet. My son was never scared of the dark, we never power struggles over toileting. He was ready when he was ready and one day I realized I had not needed to replace the nighttime pull ups in awhile! He turned 4 a few months later. Autonomy and respectful, responsive parenting is more important than compliance in every facet of socioemotional well-being for parent-child interactions.”

“Respecting a no when offering a session, even if I know its needed. Teaching them I will listen to what they are saying to hopefully long term reduce some of the "saying no because I can and expecting you to argue”.”

“Offering alternative ways to complete a task (while still achieving the learning intention), providing choice of the order in which tasks are completed (much like how I manage my own work tasks!)”

“Giving the child options are not forcing things that are not essential, especially if they really don’t matter for the sake of dominance and compliance. In a classroom where a student often struggled to transition from recess to learning time, instead of giving repeated directives like “Come in now” or “You need to listen,” I created a predictable transition routine with the student.

We co-created a visual checklist together: Take a deep breath, Get a drink, Choose a calm activity (like drawing or fidgeting), Join the group when ready I still held the expectation: you will join us for learning time.

But I offered structure through visual supports, connection through collaboration, and choice in how the student met that expectation. Structure doesn’t have to feel rigid. When kids feel seen and supported, they’re more likely to meet expectations – not because they’re forced to, but because they feel capable and safe doing so.”

“Providing many choices throughout the preschool day, like offering alternative seating options (on a wobble cushion, in a teacher’s lap or a cube chair, sitting at a table away from the group engaged in sensory play but where the student could still see and hear what was happening at circle time, for example.) But also not getting too stuck on the child NEEDING to pick one of your choices! They may find a different option that feels better for their body, and as long as it’s not dangerous I try to not interrupt to see what I can learn about their preferences and needs.”

“I try to build trust and joyful engagement in hopes of giving the child a sense of support, like we’re in this together. Let’s do this hard thing together. Something tangle is using visuals to show how many tasks are left to do, and sticking to that many!”

“Developing strategies together to make a collaborative plan and finding alternative ways for my son to communicate his needs through me to the school”

"Introduce activity and how understanding will be measured; "invite" whole group to participate in the activity, offer second opportunity for reluctant folks, and option for private participation"

"Her transition to secondary school after the long summer break was tricky. She loved primary and we expected that just moving up in the same school would be smooth. The first day she coped, but on the second day she didn't want to go. After much detective work we discovered that the new uniform was causing sensory issues; the child next to her on the school bus was making her feel anxious; and she was feeling bewildered by the new classroom block. The expectation was still that she had to attend school. We reduced demands by "compromising" on the uniform: she could wear her PE kit instead; I accompanied her to school for the next two mornings and we took our time to walk and talk together through the campus and adjust to the new space; we requested a different seat on the bus, etc. Reducing the demands on her, ensuring she felt safe and supported allowed her to feel brave and meet expectations. She's been happily attending school for the past 8 weeks: she's still not wearing the "required" uniform (still working on that) but she is happy and learning!"

"Climbing in unsafe ways. Instead, provided novel sensory experiences to capture attention and redirect to safer options."

"Daily dog walks. The walk always happens, there is always an opportunity to walk the dog and get some fresh air and exercise. The route and time spent walking can vary. Only the dog and one person have to go, everyone else can choose to come, or not to come."

"Involved the student in making a plan for how their 1:1 was to support them throughout the day. How should the 1:1 provide support after the teacher gave the instructions. How should they help in the bathroom or doing lunch?"

“For a long time mealtimes have been a highly stressful time for my family, with 2 kids fitting the diagnosis of ARFID. My husband in particular has had to let go of ideals of the “family meal” with everyone sat at the kitchen table, quietly having conversation while eating. For a long time, my son would never stay at the table for more than a few seconds at a time and my daughter would often end up under the table in shutdown.

We all have the need to eat though, and the kids cannot eat independently at this point so after lots of troubleshooting, we installed a small TV by the kitchen table. Now, the kids can have a Disney video on while it is mealtime and mealtimes look shockingly different. My son can sit there for 30 minutes without getting up and he is eating much more than he used to. No one is forcing him to eat and no one is forcing him to stay at the table. He is doing it on his own accord. My daughter also sits happily and eats more than she used to. We needed to set up the environment for success.”

“Using trust and respect. On a recent outing with my two Autistic children on public transport into a big event in the CBD I framed our family adventure by setting expectations before leaving ie staying as a group and looking out for each other and supporting each other – how this would ensure we all got to explore together and learn more about each other's interest in more detail. Established a back up plan with the children before leaving showing where we were going, what we could expect and verbalised if at any stage someone didn't feel comfortable or started to feel unsafe we could retreat to a designated safe space to regroup or return home”

“I will have a variety of activities out in the environment that are play based and work on goals and join the child wherever they choose”

“My 12 year old daughter has ADHD and ASD. At bedtime I show her a small list of the things that happen during our bedtime routine. She gets to choose the order and add breaks within that routine as needed. No matter what order she chooses, and it might take extra time to complete, but she does all of the tasks to get ready for bed, brush her hair, teeth, etc. and gets to bed happy.”

"I wonder if you would like to choose your workspace to do today's class work?"

"After school, I let my kids decide if they want to do homework when they get home, or if they want to chill out and do it later. The latest is after dinner, but they can always pick their preference and I truly do not care. If they forget and I remind them, there's no fit. They just say "oh yeah I forgot." I do similar with chores. As long as it gets done, I don't mind how or when they do it (as long as the how is safe)."

"1. A student in a self-contained class was expected to write by copying sentences provided by the teacher to earn their favorite Disney Character—the student was not following the plan and refused to write. I copied the favorite Disney Character all over the paper and asked the student to write about the character. The student now writes "long and strong" with comfort character on the paper instead of earned to comply. 2. Students in a self-contained class were being asked to comply by making projects as is. Some wanted to engage, some wanted to explore with the materials, and others wanted to only watch. I redefined participation explaining that those who wanted to explore materials are engaging safely with materials and were fostering their creativity and those who were watching may have been adverse to the materials I provided alternatives such as covering finger paint with plastic so that they could see the paint swirling around without having to touch it."

"With my daughter I tell her the expectation, give her options to complete the task and also explain to her why it is important that it be done. I also give her a deadline that the activity needs to be completed by."

"I try to focus on what I can control, but sometimes all I can do is remove myself from the situation, like "If you are hitting me, I'm going in the other room.""

“I made it clear that the comments are unacceptable, but I also decided to try and find out why he was saying these things, and if there was anything I could do to help him. I’ve tried to explain that we need to be clear about behaviour expectations, but also help him deal with the feelings behind the behaviour, and help him understand why the things he is saying are hurtful, and how to have healthy relationships.”

“I first explain the reason behind a request and we discuss what the child might want, I always listen first, even if I can not bend the expectation like bed time. We simply readdress it as often as the child needs to feel heard with their reasons and needs and me with mine – compromising on a Friday.”

“Empathize, validate and sit in the discomfort while sticking to safe and healthy boundaries (“I’m sorry I can’t let that happen but I see you and am here for you”) being available and letting them know they are seen, heard and supported.”

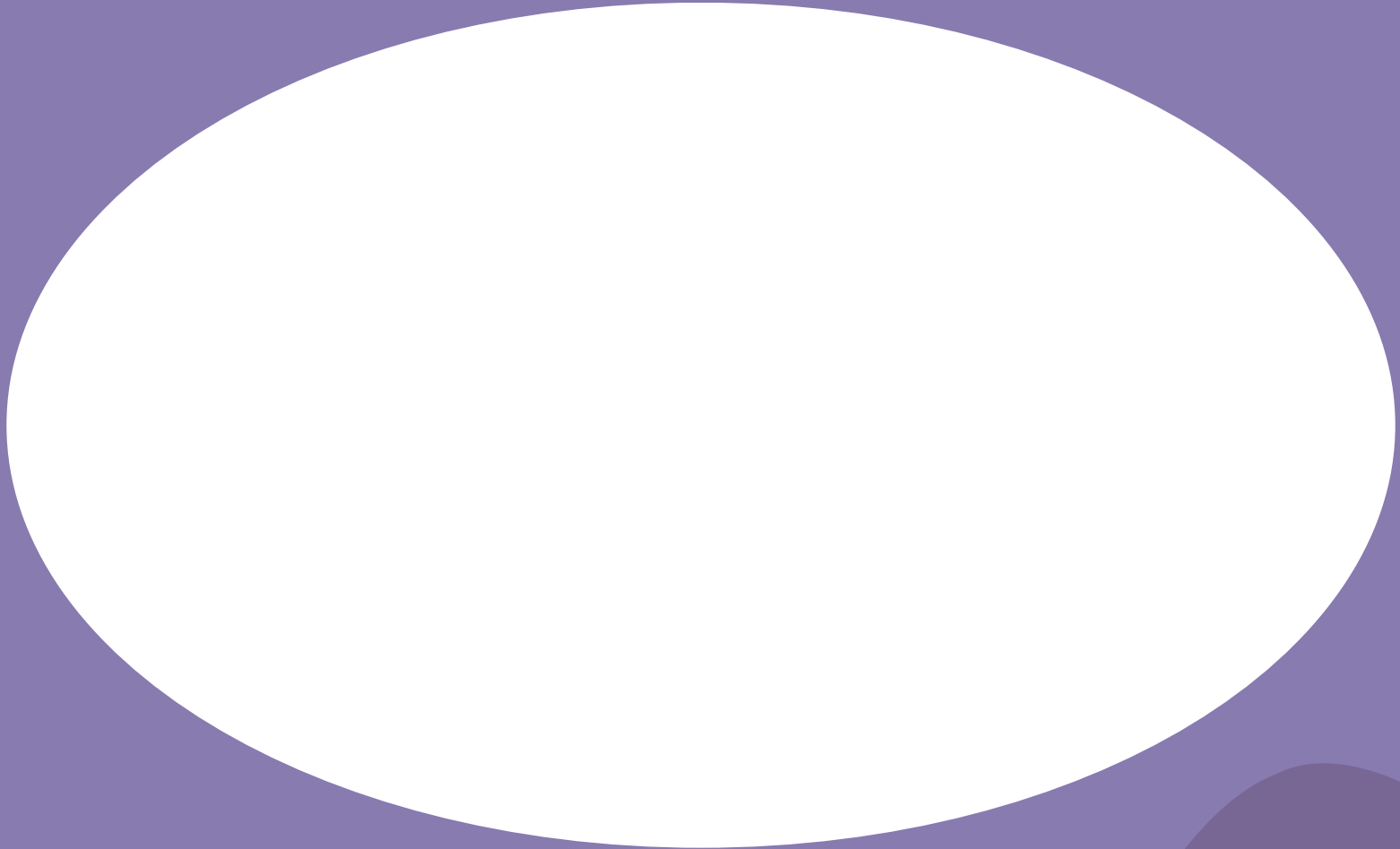
“By offering choices within clear boundaries—like saying, “You can start with drawing or with building blocks, but both need clean-up after”—so the child feels agency while still following structure.”

“During transitions: “It looks like your body still needs some help feeling calm before we go. Let’s take two deep squeezes on the ball, then I’ll count to five, and we’ll head to class together.””

“Asking the person to generate some ground rules and honor the rules they generate.”

“Inviting the child into collaborative problem-solving by saying, “Something isn’t working. Can we figure it out together?” and brainstorming solutions side by side, agreeing to try one plan and revisit it later to see if it helped.”

REFLECTION



Want more on the go
interoception activities?



THE INTEROCEPTION
ACTIVITY CARDS



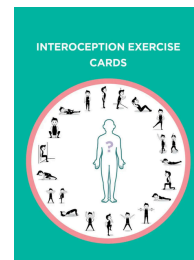
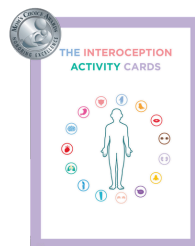
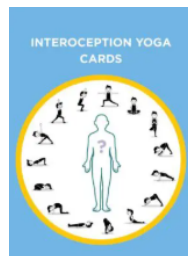
Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey

If you're ready to take this work further, here are tools I've created to support a truly “less compliance, more interoception” approach:



The Interoception Curriculum

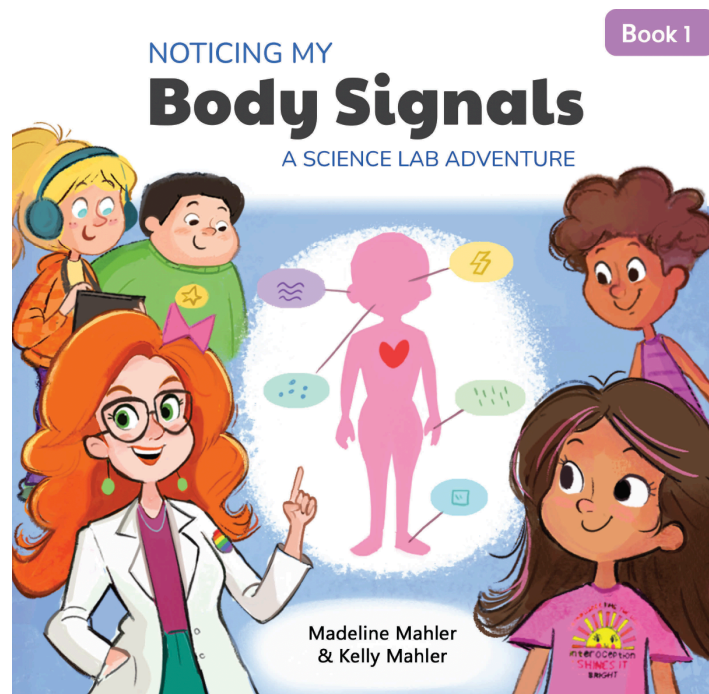
A comprehensive framework for helping learners notice, understand, and respond to their body signals.



Interoception Activity Cards, Interoception Yoga Cards, Interoception Exercise Cards

Quick, engaging activities that make interoception learning easy to integrate into daily routines at home, in therapy sessions, or in the classroom.

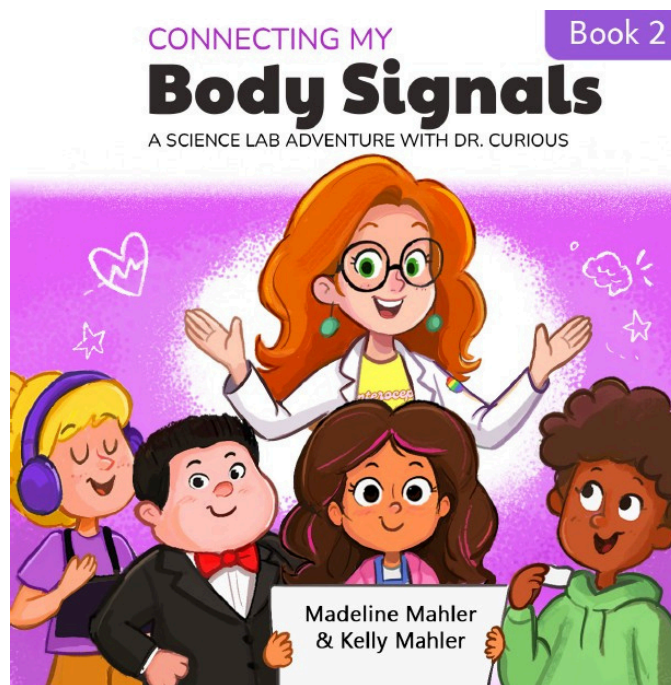
Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey



Noticing My Body Signals–Book #1 in our All-New Kids Book Series!

Begin the playful interoception journey with Dr. Curious and friends as readers explore what body signals are and how to notice them with curiosity. Filled with hands-on experiments, this interactive adventure helps kids (and the adults who support them) build inner understanding.

Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey



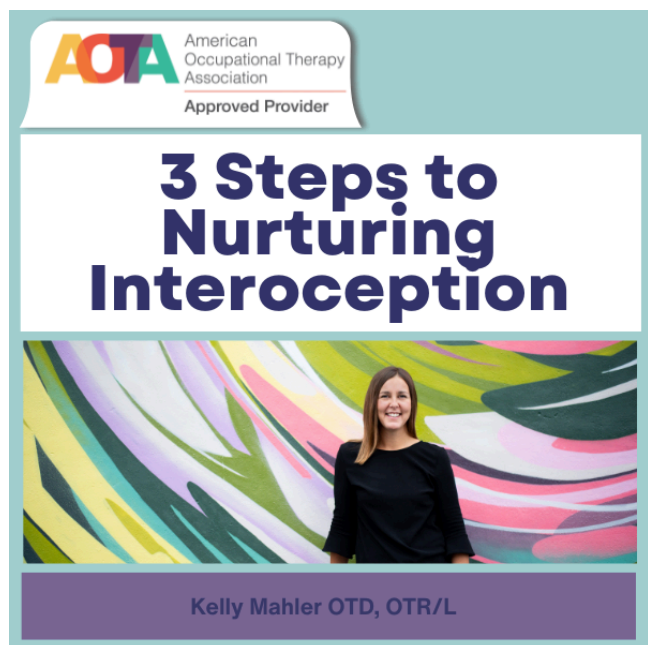
Connecting My Body Signals–Book #2 in our All-New Kids Book Series!

Continue the playful interoception journey with Dr. Curious and friends as readers explore the many different ways humans connect meaning to body signals. This interactive adventure, filled with hands-on experiments and curiosity, emphasizes that body signals can connect to emotion words, but also colors, weather, energy, and other deeply personal and valid inner experiences.

Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey

On-Demand Courses

On-demand trainings covering many different aspects of interoception—all filled with practical guidance for professionals and caregivers wanting to move away from compliance-based models.

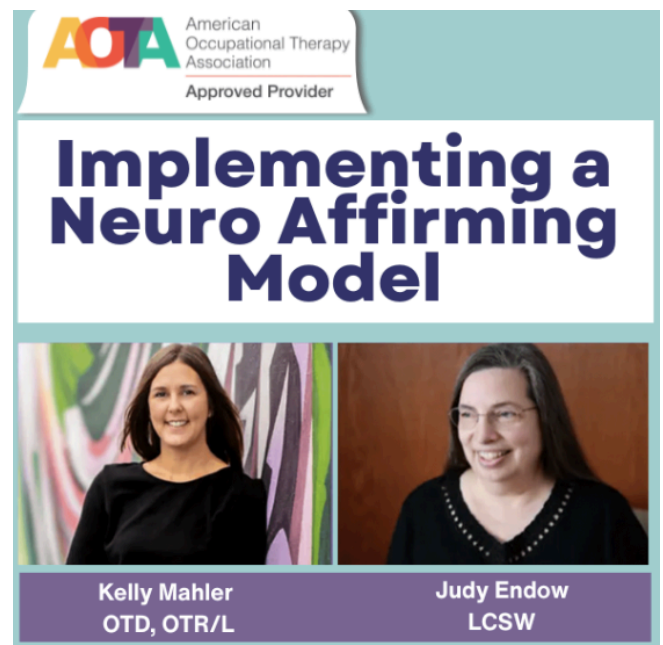


The course cover features the AOTA logo (American Occupational Therapy Association Approved Provider) in the top left. The title "3 Steps to Nurturing Interoception" is centered in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below the title is a photograph of Kelly Mahler, a woman with long brown hair wearing a black top, standing in front of a colorful, abstract background with green, yellow, and pink brushstrokes. At the bottom, a purple bar contains the name "Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L" in white text.

AOTA American Occupational Therapy Association
Approved Provider

3 Steps to Nurturing Interoception

Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L



The course cover features the AOTA logo (American Occupational Therapy Association Approved Provider) in the top left. The title "Implementing a Neuro Affirming Model" is centered in a large, bold, dark blue font. Below the title is a photograph of two women, Kelly Mahler and Judy Endow, smiling. Kelly is on the left and Judy is on the right, both wearing black tops. At the bottom, a purple bar contains their names and credentials: "Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L" and "Judy Endow LCSW" in white text.

AOTA American Occupational Therapy Association
Approved Provider

Implementing a Neuro Affirming Model

Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L Judy Endow LCSW

Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey



Modern Emotion Regulation Supports



Kelly Mahler OTD, OTR/L



Co-Regulation, Sensory Safety, & Interoception




Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

Greg Santucci
MS OTR/L

Continue the “Less Compliance” Journey

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Autistic Burnout & Interoception



Tanya Adkin David Gray-Hammond Kelly Mahler

PART ONE

ARFID, Feeding Challenges & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

Naureen Hunani
RD

PART TWO

ARFID, Feeding Challenges & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L

Naureen Hunani
RD

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Toileting 2.0 & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L



Sahana Baker-Malone
OTD, OTR/L, PRPC



American
Occupational Therapy
Association

Approved Provider

Early Communication & Interoception



Kelly Mahler
OTD, OTR/L



Anna Vander Haeghe
BScOT