



INTEROCEPTION

A toolkit for parents and carers of Autistic young people in secondary school.

INTEROCEPTION



INTRODUCTION

- This guide is for parents and carers of Autistic young people in secondary school.
- There are worksheets to assist parents/carers and Autistic young people with interoception.
- The purpose of this guide is to support Autistic students with brain and body connection at school.
- Building a connection between the brain and body helps with interoceptive awareness.

WHAT IS INTEROCEPTION?

Interoception is the awareness of sensations inside the body. Our bodies prefer to stay comfortable and regulated. The brain helps with this by paying attention to signals that need action, while filtering out those that can be ignored or dealt with later. For example, if you are hungry, a rumbling stomach will send a signal to brain that you need to eat.

The body's internal signals include:

- Managing energy levels, such as fatigue or restlessness.
- Hunger and fullness
- Thirst (hydration)
- Bladder and bowel fullness
- Temperature regulation
- Pain and discomfort, including nausea
- Heart rate
- Breathing
- Itching



Interoception is the ability to sense what's going on inside your body. It's kind of like your body's internal GPS – it helps you to know how you're feeling physically and emotionally.¹

— Dr Neff

The body naturally works to stay balanced and feel stable. It relies on internal signals to make adjustments that support comfort, regulation, and overall wellbeing. By increasing awareness of interoceptive signals, we can better recognise and respond to these cues, promoting greater self-regulation and supporting emotional and physical health and wellbeing.

¹ Neff, M.A. (no date). Autism, Interoception, and How to Improve Your Awareness. Retrieved May 22 2025, from <https://neurodivergentinsights.com/autism-interoception/>

Autism and Interoception

Research has shown that Autistic people can often find it more difficult to tune into, and /or name internal body sensations than non-Autistic people.² This may mean Autistic people may not notice sensations in their body until they need urgent attention.

Given these differences in interoceptive awareness, Autistic young people may find it more difficult to notice and respond to internal body sensations. For an example a headache can mean different things, such as dehydration, stress or illness.

Interoception and Emotional Regulation

Our bodies and emotions are interconnected, and our interoception sense can support us to link the physiological sensations we experience to our emotional experiences. People will often feel emotions in their bodies, such as feeling tightness in their stomach when feeling anxious or scared. At times, the physical sensations in our body can influence our mood. For example, it's not uncommon for people to become irritable when hungry, which is sometimes called being 'hangry.'

Autistic Teens in Secondary School

Autistic children often depend on external prompts to recognise and respond to their bodily needs and internal sensations. These reminders help them remember self-care routines, such as using the toilet, drinking water, and eating. When Autistic children transition from primary to secondary school, the structure of their day undergoes significant changes. These changes can include:

- Moving between different classrooms.
- Multiple different teachers across the day.
- Storing items in a locker.
- Less structure at recess and lunchtime.

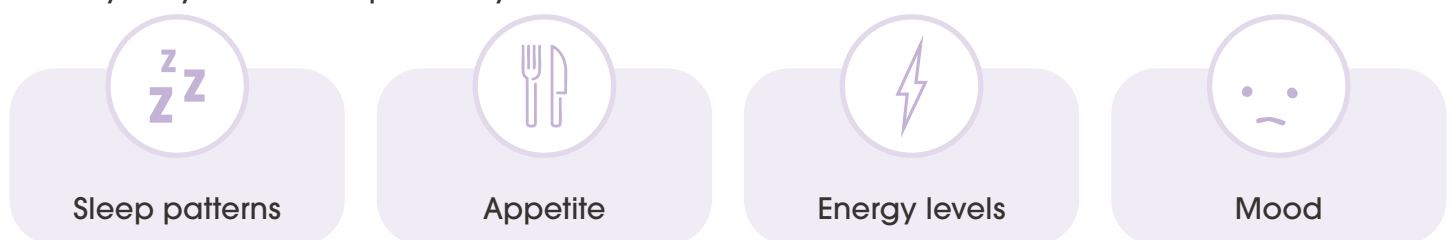
This may mean that strategies used to monitor interoception sensations may need to be tailored to the new environment.

Strategy development should be individualised and developed collaboratively. Autistic teens may prefer discrete reminders, so as not to draw too much attention to what is happening. For example, if a young person requires a visual reminder to use the toilet, they may feel embarrassed to use it in secondary school and prefer a subtle calendar or silent smart watch reminder.

Autism, Interoception and Puberty

Puberty brings new physical and emotional sensations. For Autistic young people, these changes may create a change in their experience of sensations, or they may need to adjust their routine, such as applying deodorant after PE at school, or changing pads/tampons during the day.

Puberty may have an impact on your child's:



There may be additional sensations, such as growing pains during growth spurts. Also, period pain and hormonal fluctuations associated with menstruation can have an impact on pain levels and touch sensitivity.

² Williams, Z. J., Suzman, E., Bordman, S. L., Markfeld, J. E., Kaiser, S. M., Dunham, K. A., ... & Woynaroski, T. G. (2023). Characterizing interoceptive differences in autism: a systematic review and meta-analysis of case-control studies. *Journal of autism and developmental disorders*, 53(3), 947-962.

SUPPORTING AUTISTIC TEENS WITH INTEROCEPTION AT SCHOOL

Autistic young people may benefit from additional support with interoceptive awareness at secondary school. The transition to secondary school may mean some previous structures that support interoceptive awareness may not be the same. Unlike in primary school, your child will have numerous teachers across the day in secondary school and move between classrooms.

Talking to your Child

When speaking to your child, choose a time when they feel comfortable and relaxed. If your child finds it difficult to talk about their bodily sensations, consider using reflective activities to encourage conversation. For some children, visual tools can be very helpful in exploring different sensations.

TIP: Discuss significant sensations and emotions after they occur.

Reflection Activities

Talking with a trusted adult at the end of the day can be a valuable way to help your child recognise their internal sensations and develop the language to describe their daily experiences. The worksheets linked below will help your child understand what makes them feel comfortable or uncomfortable during the school day.

Worksheet 1 — Locating and Identifying Body Sensations

[Print](#)[Digital](#)[Example](#)

Worksheet 2 — Naming and Understanding your Body Sensations

[Print](#)[Digital](#)

Exploring Strategies for Teens

Each person's body is unique, meaning that the support strategies for your child's needs should be individualised. Here are some ways to address the areas of interoception that your child may find challenging with strategies that are effective during the school day.

Collaborative strategy development

Encourage your child to brainstorm self-care strategies that will work for them. These strategies can help them check in with their bodies and develop reminders for self-care routines. Here are a few ideas:

- Modelling interoceptive awareness and strategies in front of your child can help them develop a vocabulary for sensations, such as, "My mouth is dry, and it is a hot day; I should drink some water."
- Set reminders on a smart watch for eating, drinking, and using the toilet.
- Use stickers as reminders on locker door timetables or in diaries.
- Check the weather forecast together to decide what clothing to wear, including sun or rain protection
- Some students may wear their sports uniform to help with temperature regulation across the day.
- Ensure your child has access to water and snacks. If large meals are challenging at school, smaller snacks throughout the day can be beneficial.

This is a good opportunity to explore ways to increase your child's awareness of their bodily sensations throughout the day. These types of strategies can significantly support your child's overall wellbeing at school.

Communicating with the School

Collaborating with your child's school is essential for implementing strategies. If your child is receiving therapy outside of school, the therapists can offer professional advice on supporting your child's body awareness. They will have insights into your child and can suggest strategies that may help in the school environment.

Work with the school to identify opportunities throughout the day. This includes natural breaks, prompts, or adjustments that can better support your child.

Further Support

Occupational therapists work with Autistic people on interoception and support strategies. To find an occupational therapist, visit Occupational Therapy Australia's [Find an OT](#) page.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interoception

[Ready to Learn: Interoception kit](#) by Department of Education (SA)

This resource contains a comprehensive list of body awareness activities, including activities for the home.

[Interoception: knowing yourself inside and out](#) by Reframing Autism

Communicating with your child's school

ACD has a library of resources for parents and carers on [Student Support Group \(SSG\)](#) meetings and [Reasonable Adjustments](#).

Emotional Regulation

[Emotional regulation: Tips for Autistic teens resources](#) by Amaze

Executive Functioning

[Executive functioning: working memory, time management and organisation](#) by Amaze

[Executive functioning: flexible thinking, self-monitoring and managing distractions](#) by Amaze

INSTRUCTIONS

The goal of this worksheet is to guide your child in locating and identifying sensations in the body.

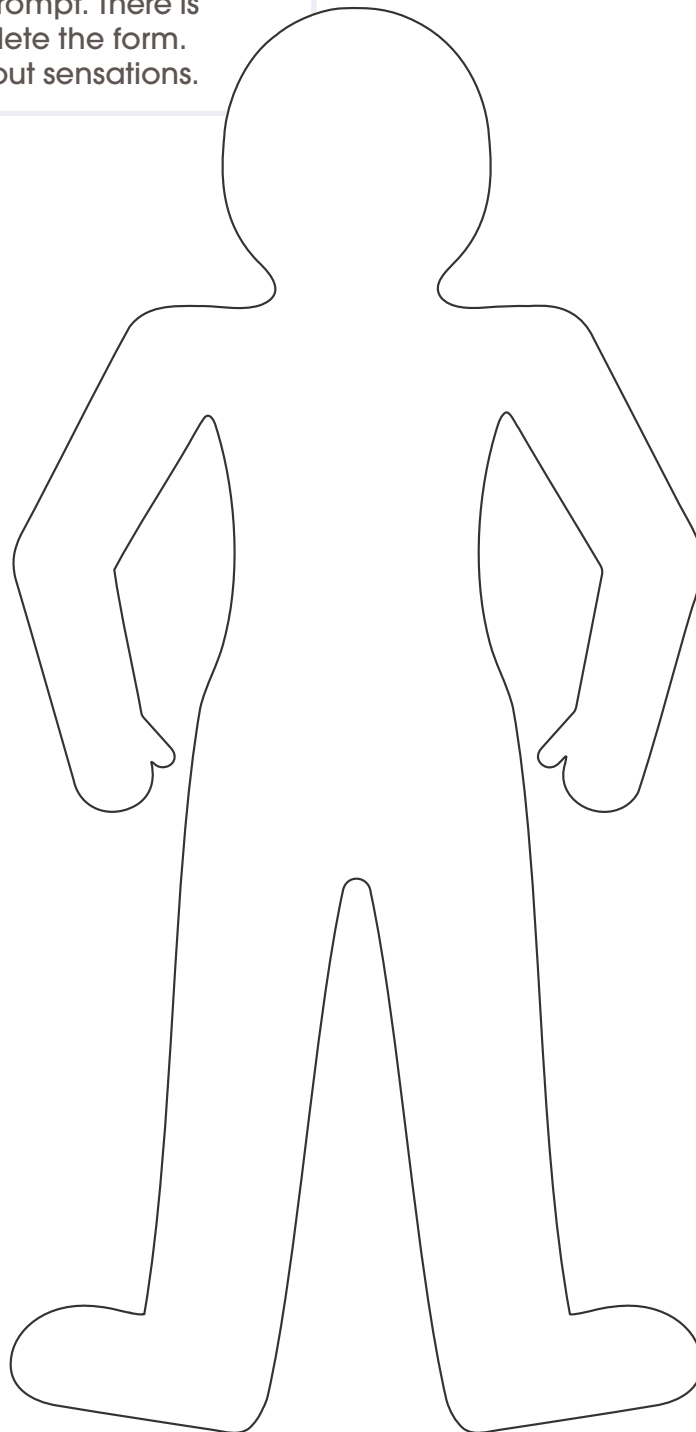
The worksheet can be completed by:

- Colouring in
- Drawing symbols
- Using stickers
- Writing

KEY

Create your own key here

Remember – this is a prompt. There is no ‘right way’ to complete the form. It’s a template to work out sensations.



DATE

INSTRUCTIONS

The goal of this worksheet is to guide your child in locating and identifying sensations in the body.

The worksheet can be completed by:

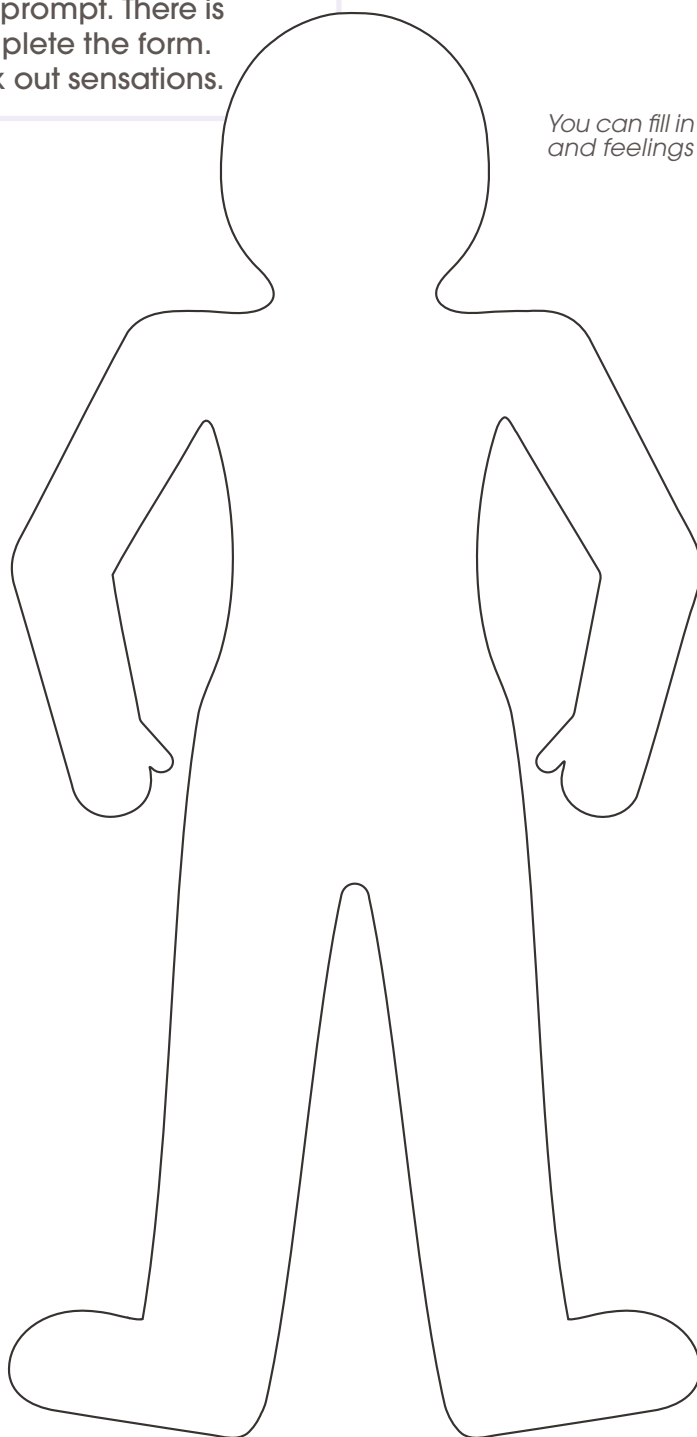
- Colouring in
- Drawing symbols
- Using stickers
- Writing

KEY

Create your own key here

Remember – this is a prompt. There is no ‘right way’ to complete the form. It’s a template to work out sensations.

You can fill in these bubbles with sensations and feelings if completing online.



Or draw with your pen tool

DATE

INSTRUCTIONS

The goal of this worksheet is to guide your child in locating and identifying sensations in the body.

The worksheet can be completed by:

- Colouring in
- Drawing symbols
- Using stickers
- Writing

KEY

Create your own key here



Tightness

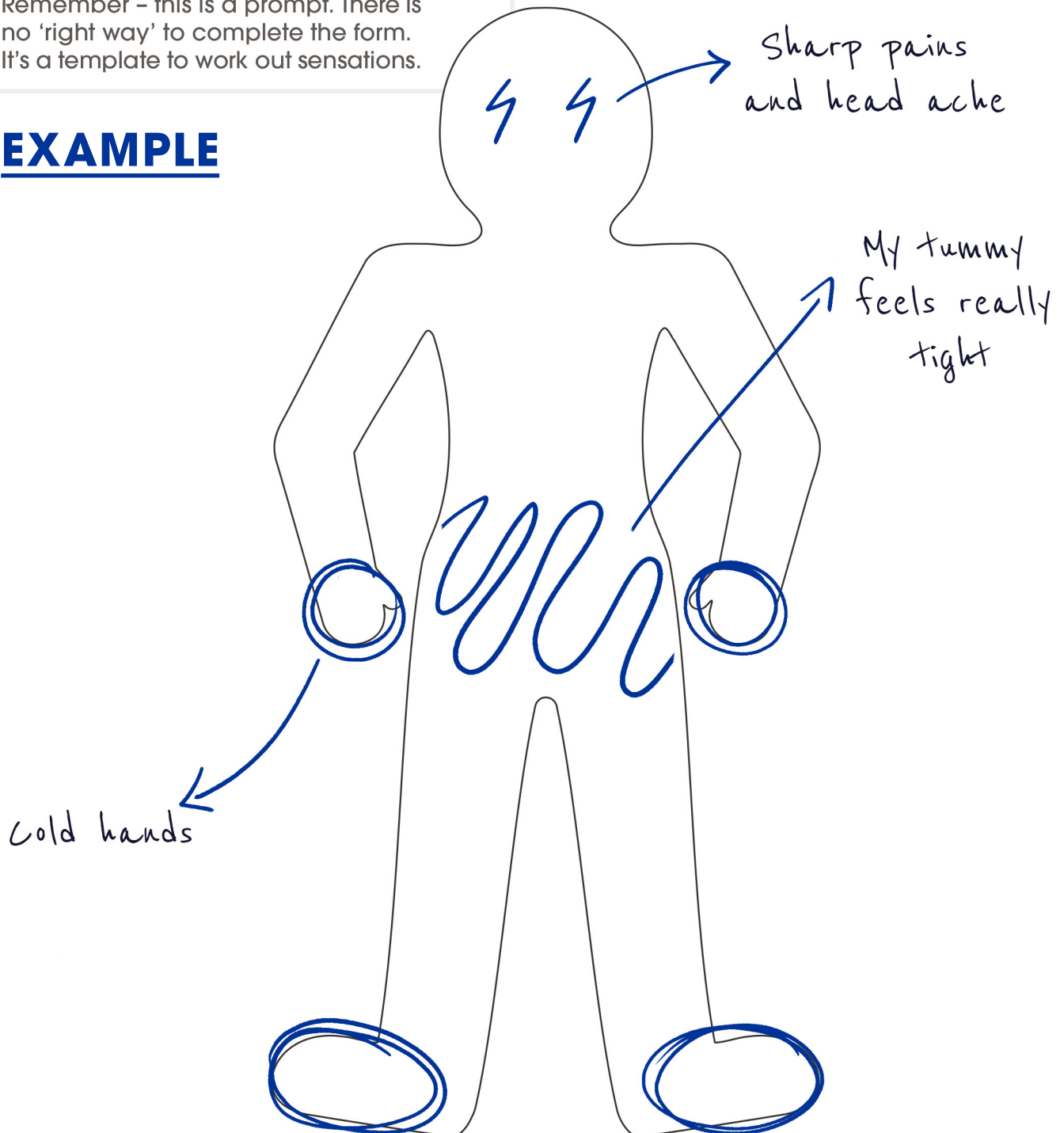


Cold



Sharp pains

Remember – this is a prompt. There is no ‘right way’ to complete the form. It’s a template to work out sensations.

EXAMPLE


DATE

INSTRUCTIONS

This worksheet is designed for use after filling out worksheet 1.

The goal of this worksheet is to guide your child through this problem-solving worksheet. This so your child can use their own words to describe their body sensations.

There is a scale below to help your child rate uncomfortable and comfortable sensations.

This worksheet will assist you and your child to identify self-management opportunities during the school day. It's also an opportunity to discuss how to increase safe and comfortable sensations during the day.

QUESTIONS

What did you feel in your body?

Where did you feel it in your body?

When was this happening at that time?

Where were you?

What time of day?

What were you doing?



UNCOMFORTABLE

COMFORTABLE

DATE

INSTRUCTIONS

This worksheet is designed for use after filling out worksheet 1.

The goal of this worksheet is to guide your child through this problem-solving worksheet. This so your child can use their own words to describe their body sensations.

There is a scale below to help your child rate uncomfortable and comfortable sensations.

This worksheet will assist you and your child to identify self-management opportunities during the school day. It's also an opportunity to discuss how to increase safe and comfortable sensations during the day.

QUESTIONS

What did you feel in your body?

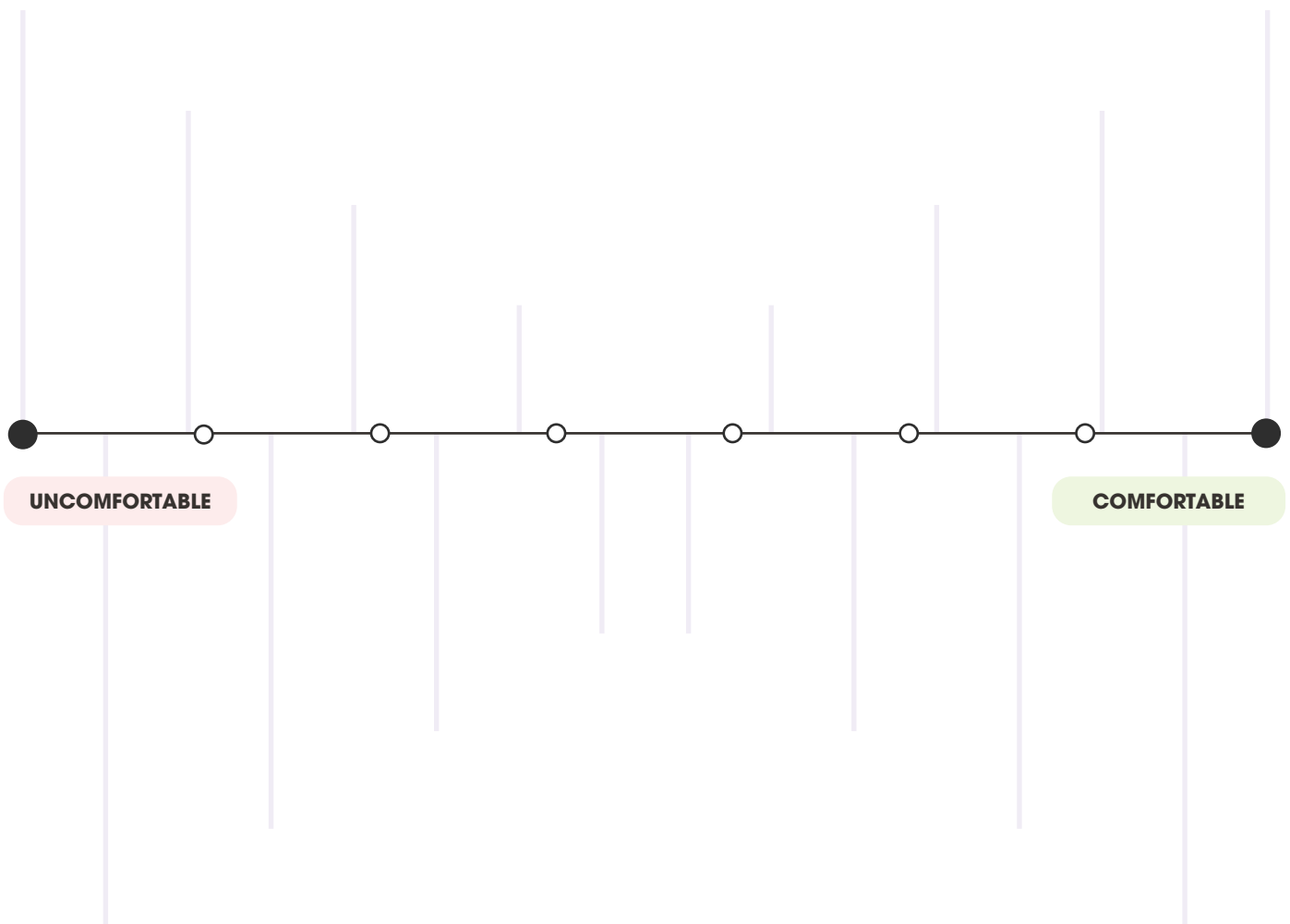
Where did you feel it in your body?

When was this happening at that time?

Where were you?

What time of day?

What were you doing?



DATE





Amaze Inc.

678 Victoria Street,
Richmond VIC 3121

Phone: 03 9657 1600

Email: info@amaze.org.au

www.amaze.org.au

 /AmazeAutismAU
 @AmazeAutismAU
 @AmazeAutism
 /AmazeAutism

Acknowledgment

This resource was developed with input from Occupational Therapists. The creation of these resources were proudly funded by the Victorian Department of Education.

Amaze © 2025

Permission is granted for the content of this information sheet to be reproduced in its entirety, provided Amaze is acknowledged as the source. Content is provided for educational and information purposes only. Information about a therapy, service, product or treatment does not imply endorsement and is not intended to replace advice from your doctor or other registered health professional.