

# The Autism Connection

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**AUTISM SOCIETY**  
Improving the Lives of All Affected by Autism  
Wisconsin



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• **BEYOND BEHAVIORS** •  
UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE MENTAL  
HEALTH NEEDS OF AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

NOVEMBER 29, 2018 | SENTRYWORLD | STEVENS POINT, WI

*We hope to see you there!*

## Message from the President

First off, thank you for your well wishes as I recover from successful knee replacement surgery. Nothing beats the "original equipment" but nothing is better than something when it comes to pain and discomfort, so I am very thankful to modern medicine.

Fall brings a review of this year's events from our first Tee-Time for Autism at SentryWorld (featuring Green Bay Packer wide receiver Bill Schroeder) and our Fall conference in Neenah (featuring Carol Gray presenting "Not Your Mother's Social Stories™"). Both were a great success, due largely to you and your enthusiasm to support our mission.

Please mark your calendar for Thursday, August 1, 2019. That date marks our second Tee-Time for Autism at SentryWorld in Stevens Point. Hope you can join us. The inaugural 2018 event was great, and the 2019 event will be even better! Please join us as a volunteer, player or sponsor. Tee-Time for Autism, let's play a round!

And speaking of SentryWorld, we will host the November Mental Health Conference in the Atrium. More information regarding this event can be found on page 4.

As I write this, I am reminded of the many things I am thankful for. And with Thanksgiving just around the corner, I hope you take some time to share your thanks with family and friends. Particularly in this divisive political environment, let's concentrate on the ties that bind us rather than what separates us. Autism has brought us all so many wonderful opportunities to experience the world. Vive la difference!

Meantime, please know that we would welcome your call with any questions or requests.

All the best,

Robert S. Johnston, President  
Autism Society of Wisconsin

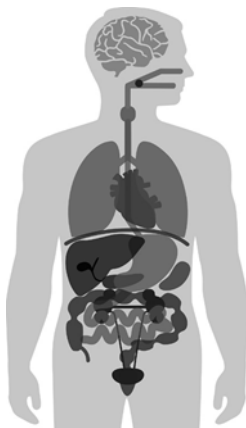
# Interoception: The Eighth Sense

By Kelly Mahler, MS, OTR/L

Sit back and close your eyes. What do you *feel* inside your body?



- Is your heart beating fast or slow?
- Is your bladder full or empty?
- Is your stomach growling, full or content?
- Are your muscles tense or loose?
- Does your mouth feel dry or OK?
- Do your hands feel cold or warm?



Most of us are able to *feel* all of these body signals and more with the help of our little-known, but very important, eighth sense, Interoception.

**Why is it important to *feel* your body signals?** Interoception helps us clearly identify our emotions. Each emotion feels differently in our body. For example, before speaking in public, your body may *feel* a certain way: your heart may race, your muscles may feel tense and shaky, your breathing may become shallow, and your stomach may feel fluttery. These body signals let you know that you are feeling nervous. Without clearly noticing these body signals, it is difficult to identify emotions with a high degree of speed and clarity. Interoception helps us to feel these body signals, thus allowing us to clearly identify a wide variety of emotions including hunger, fullness, pain, illness, need for the bathroom, anxiety, anger, calmness and sensory overload.

**What is the connection between interoception & self-regulation?**

When our interoceptive system is working at its best, our body signals alert us that something feels 'off' and motivates us to act, to do something that will help our body feel more comfortable. For example, if we notice a dry mouth and know that it means we are thirsty – we get a drink; if we notice a sweat on our skin and warm muscles, and know that it means we feel hot– we seek shade or a fan; if we notice tight fists and tense muscles and know that it means we are getting frustrated—we seek help. Interoception underlies our urge to use a self-regulation action. If we *feel* that our internal balance is off, and understand what that feeling means—we are motivated to act, to seek immediate relief from the discomfort. **You need to know exactly how you feel in order to manage it effectively!**

**How does difficulty with interoception influence self-regulation?**

Typical interoception is one of the biggest predictors of the ability to independently self-regulate because the ability to notice body signals and connect them to an emotion serves as the urge or motivation to use coping skills timely, independently, in the moment. Essentially, self-regulation requires Body-Emotion-Action connections. Therefore, when an individual has difficulty with interoception, often times, they are missing the important starting point of self-regulation. Take the following stories for example:

Join us for Kelly Mahler's keynote address on Interoception on April 12th.

More information on page 6!

"I wouldn't realize I was angry until I hit or kicked something. I didn't notice the anger feelings in my body."---Jackson, 10-years old

"I was an encyclopedia of coping strategies. I could tell you over 50 strategies that people taught me to use to 'calm down.' Amount I could use in the moment? Zero. I did not feel the need to use the strategies."---Chloe, 22-years old

"I didn't realize I was hungry until I was irritable and HANGRY. Even at that point, I didn't always realize that my uncomfortable, irritable feeling was extreme hunger."---Declan, 14-years old

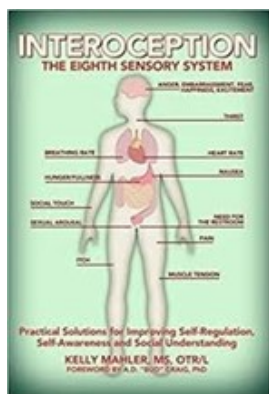
"I used to eat and eat and eat to the point of vomiting. I did not notice the signals in my body telling me when I was full and it was time to stop eating."---Becky, 30-years old

"My son broke his leg and walked around like everything was just fine for 3 days. He didn't notice the pain."---Julie, mom to a 5-year old

"My daughter does not realize that she has to go to the bathroom until it is an extreme sensation. We are always running for the nearest toilet and don't always make it on time." Dan, dad to a 7-year old

## What do we know about Interoception & Autism?

As with the other 7 senses, many individuals with autism experience differences in interoception. We certainly have a long way to go to understand the interoception experiences of individuals with autism, but emerging studies show that many (not all) individuals with autism have differences in the awareness of their body signals. These research findings are in line with the many personal accounts shared by people with autism regarding altered pain, temperature, hunger, thirst and emotion experiences.



## Can interoception be improved?

The good news is, YES! Research clearly states that interoception can be improved. Neuroscience research indicates that the use of strategies derived from the field of mindfulness can not only improve our awareness of our body signals, but it can also positively impact specific areas of the brain. That being said, mindfulness, or paying attention to your body in a specific way, can be incredibly abstract for most people, including people with autism! To overcome this barrier, multiple mindfulness strategies have been adapted in order to make them more concrete, visual, and interactive and are showing positive outcomes in both real life and in research. Many of these strategies are shared in the book Interoception: The Eighth Sensory System (Mahler, 2015) and will also be featured in the upcoming Interoception Curriculum (in press, [www.aapcpublishing.net](http://www.aapcpublishing.net)) which provides a step-by-step process for building the body-emotion-action connections needed for independent self-regulation.

# • BEYOND BEHAVIORS •

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING THE MENTAL  
HEALTH NEEDS OF AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS

NOVEMBER 29, 2018 | SENTRYWORLD | STEVENS POINT, WI



Mental health concerns are common for individuals on the autism spectrum, yet their struggles in this area often go overlooked and untreated. In this training, we will explore what individuals with autism share about their experiences and the impact living with autism has on their mental health. We will explore the myths and realities of autism and mental health, with a focus on building understanding around the complexities of how these two areas intersect for individuals. This training will provide specific resources for mental health professionals and others looking to learn more about the complexity of helping a person manage multiple conditions, particularly for those on the autism spectrum. This training is suitable for mental health professionals, teachers, parents and others interested in learning how to better support and treat mental health concerns for autistic people.

## Workshop Learning Objectives:

- Increased awareness of symptom presentation of common mental health concerns that co-occur with autism and how they may present differently for an autistic individual
- Identify contributing factors to anxiety and depression in individuals with autism
- Develop skills to individualize treatment strategies to match the individual and their neurology
- Increase knowledge of effective treatment options and evaluating effectiveness
- Develop an understanding of how to adjust treatment strategies when working with non-verbal or less verbal individuals

## Meet the Presenters:

**Sharon Hammer, MS, LPC** is an Educational and Behavioral Consultant and a Licensed Professional Counselor. She has over 20-years of experience working with children and individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. Sharon is a partner at Imagine a Child's Capacity, where she provides training and consultation to schools, community members, and parents.

**Lisa Hoeme, MS, LPC** is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Educational and Behavior Consultant and a partner at Imagine a Child's Capacity where she provides training and consultation to schools, community agencies and parents. She has more than 18 years of clinical experience serving an expansive range individuals and families, including those with autism, Down syndrome, traumatic brain injury, attention difficulties, obsessive compulsive disorder, anxiety and depression.

**Ellen Eggen, MS LPC ATR-BC** is a licensed professional counselor and a nationally board certified registered art therapist. She is passionate about working with individuals on the autism spectrum and their families. Over the last two years she has worked as an independent contractor with Imagine a Child's Capacity, providing art therapy services. Ellen is also the director of mental health service at Common Threads Family Resource Center in McFarland, Wisconsin.

Deadline to register is November 19, 2018

Autism Society Member | \$100   Non Member | \$125   Person with Autism | \$50

[www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

# Fall Events

November 3 9:00–10:00 am	<b>Monkey Joe’s Family Activity   Autism Society of the Fox Valley</b> 1800 N Casaloma Dr, Appleton, WI 54913 Parents can meet other parents, siblings can meet other sibs, and kids on the spectrum can safely bounce, jump, slide, and have fun with other kids. You may stay after they open to the public at 10:00. Questions? Email <a href="mailto:asfvevents@autismfoxvalley.org">asfvevents@autismfoxvalley.org</a>
November 6 6:30–8:30 pm	<b>Parent Support Group   Autism Society of Central Wisconsin</b> St. Mark’s Lutheran Preschool, 600 Stevens Dr., Wausau. If you have never been to one of our meetings before, this would be a great opportunity to come and get to know us. If you have questions call 715–359–0886.
November 10 8:00 am–3:00 pm	<b>Ugly Sweater Run/Walk Baymont Inn Manitowoc   Autism Society of the Lakeshore</b> The Ugly Sweater Run/Walk is a fabulously fun event which includes showcasing the ugliest sweater imaginable. We have an Ugly Sweater Contest right after the event. The event features a 5k/10k distance. For more information visit <a href="https://www.active.com/manitowoc-wi/running/distance-running-races/ugly-sweater-run-walk-2018">https://www.active.com/manitowoc-wi/running/distance-running-races/ugly-sweater-run-walk-2018</a>
November 10 9:30 am–3:30 pm	<b>Support Parent Training   Parent to Parent of Wisconsin</b> North Star Services, Inc., 450 E State St., Adams, WI. Join us for training and learn how to give support to other parents through our statewide network of families who support each other on their journey of parenting children with special needs. For more information or to register for training call Julie Rogers at (715) 361–2898 or email <a href="mailto:jarogers@chw.org">jarogers@chw.org</a>
November 17 8:30–10:00 am	<b>Spectrum Saturday at the Building for Kids   Autism Society of the Fox Valley</b> 100 W College Ave., Appleton Join us for a lower sensory experience and special programming created especially for children on the autism spectrum. Free admission for children on the spectrum and their families from 8:30 am–10 am, but stay as late as you want! Programming begins at 9 am. For more information visit <a href="https://buildingforkids.org/calendar/spectrum-saturday/">https://buildingforkids.org/calendar/spectrum-saturday/</a>
November 18 1:00–3:00 pm	<b>Pizza and Bowling   Autism Society of the Lakeshore</b> Rudy’s Lanes, 1916 Washington St., Two Rivers. Free Bowling and pizza & soda for families and individuals affected by autism. If you have any questions email <a href="mailto:autismlakeshore@gmail.com">autismlakeshore@gmail.com</a>
November 20 6:00–8:00 pm	<b>Parent/Caregiver Support Group   Autism Society of Northeast WI</b> Kavarna Coffee House, 143 N. Broadway, Green Bay. Join us for coffee and conversation. Contact <a href="mailto:administrator@asnew.org">administrator@asnew.org</a>
November 24 10:30 am–12:00 pm	<b>Reel Movies for REAL Needs – Wreck it Ralph 2   Autism Society of Northeast WI</b> Marcus Bay Park Cinema, 755 Willard Dr., Green Bay. Please join us for a sensory friendly movie experience! Sound is down and lights are up. ASNEW will cover up to four tickets per family for members. Please try to be there by 10:15 to check in at the front desk. Contact <a href="mailto:administrator@asnew.org">administrator@asnew.org</a> for more information.

# 30th Annual Conference

Kalahari Convention Center | April 11–13, 2019



Thursday, April 11 | Pre-Conference Options

Comprehensive Evaluation for Special Education Eligibility  
DPI and Discretionary Grant Staff

College and Career Ready IEPs Through the Lens of Autism  
DPI and Discretionary Grant Staff

I Think We're Ready for This... ASD and Preparing for Puberty  
Shana Nichols, Ph.D.

It's Different For Girls: Understanding and Supporting Females with ASD  
Shana Nichols, Ph.D.

Friday, April 12 | Keynote Address



Interoception, The Eighth Sense: Influence on Self-Regulation, Health  
and Emotional Well-Being  
Kelly Mahler, MS, OTR/L

Interoception is an important sensory system that helps us to 'feel' body signals like a full bladder, growling stomach, tense muscles or speeding heart. Research indicates that our ability to clearly feel these internal signals enables us to accurately identify and manage how we feel: Do we feel Anxious? Frustrated? Hungry? Full? In pain? Need the bathroom? Many autistic individuals can have differences in interoception, causing significant challenges in identifying and managing the way they feel. This presentation will provide participants with an overview of what research tells us about interoception as well as how this sense influences self-regulation, health and emotional well-being.

# Call for Proposals

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The deadline for proposals to present a breakout session at the Autism Society of Wisconsin's 30th Annual Conference has been extended to November 21, 2018!

The purpose of the Autism Society of Wisconsin's Annual Conference is to provide a wide range of information to those affected by autism. Our goal is to provide relevant information for attendees at all levels, including those who are new to autism and those who have years of experience.

We're looking for high quality proposals that include practical strategies and evidence based research addressing a range of issues facing individuals with autism and their families. Breakout sessions take place on Friday and Saturday, lasting one hour and fifteen minutes each. We are not able to offer an honorarium or cover expenses for any presenters.

Topic ideas include:

- Girls/women on the spectrum
- Adult focused sessions (transitions, workplace, etc.)
- Employment
- Adolescence/puberty
- Mental health; depression, anxiety, and PTSD
- Twice exceptional
- LGBTQIA and ASD
- Supports for non-verbal individuals with ASD
- Sensory topics

All proposals are due by Wednesday, November 21, 2018.

## Advertise / Sponsor / Exhibit

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We offer opportunities for businesses and organizations to participate in conference through exhibiting, advertising, or sponsoring. Organizations may sign up to have an exhibit table from Thursday, April 11th–Saturday, April 13th to showcase their services and resources. Guests will have many opportunities throughout the conference to visit the exhibit hall to learn more about your organization. Sponsorship and advertising opportunities are also offered for extra recognition during the conference.. If interested in any of these opportunities, please look for more information at our website for more information: [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

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## Early Bird Registration Opens Soon!

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[www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

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1-888-4-AUTISM (WI only)  
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Menasha, WI 54952

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Help us fulfill our mission!

Support the Autism Society of Wisconsin by making a tax deductible gift! All donations are appreciated.

\_\_\_\_\_ \$25    \_\_\_\_\_ \$50    \_\_\_\_\_ \$75    \_\_\_\_\_ \$100    \_\_\_\_\_ \$200    \_\_\_\_\_ \$ Other

Donations may be sent to:  
Autism Society of Wisconsin  
1477 Kenwood Drive  
Menasha, WI 54952

We also accept donations online . Click the Donate Now button on our  
homepage: [www.asw4autism.org](http://www.asw4autism.org)

Thank you for your support!

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