

Mental Health Matters: Introduction to Mental Health in Autistic Children and Youth

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AutismONTARIO

Presenters



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Agenda

- Mental health and autism as co-occurring conditions
- Self-regulation
- Theories/Approaches:
 - Lifestyle/environmental factors
 - Brain/body factors
- Supporting childhood mental health

What is Mental Health?

“Emotions, cognition, and behaviours that vary in response to stress and resilience”

(Sick Kids, 2021)



Co-occurring Conditions

Co-occurring mental health conditions:

- **Anxiety:** 40-55%
- **Depression:** 26%
- **Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD):** 40-70%
- **Bipolar disorder:** 7.5%



Co-occurring Conditions

Autistic people may:

- Experience increased stressors
- Struggle with self-regulation
- Have intensified feelings of anxiety and stress
- Be less likely to be diagnosed

Video- Self-Regulation



Sesame Street: Me Want it (But me Wait)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9PnbKL3wuH4&t=11s>

Steps for Self-Regulation

**Internal
Awareness**

**Emotional
Literacy**

**Resolving
the Feeling**

Lifestyle Factors



SLEEP



**NUTRITION/
DIET**

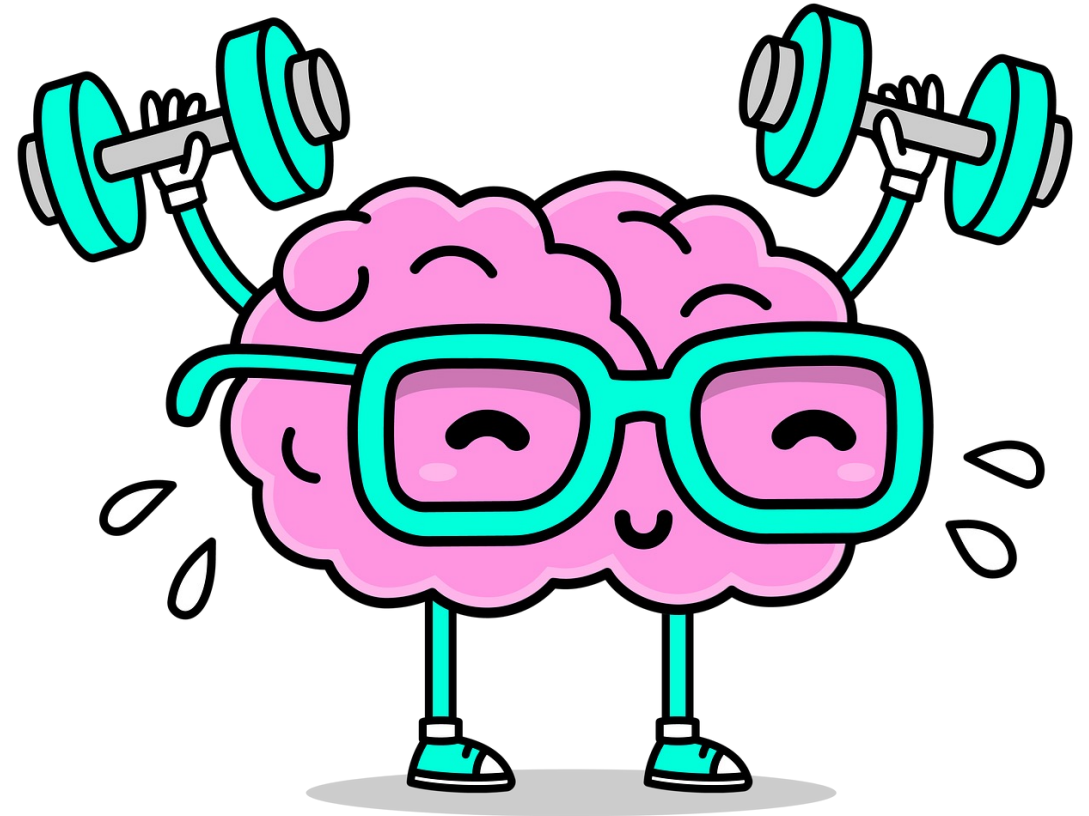


EXERCISE

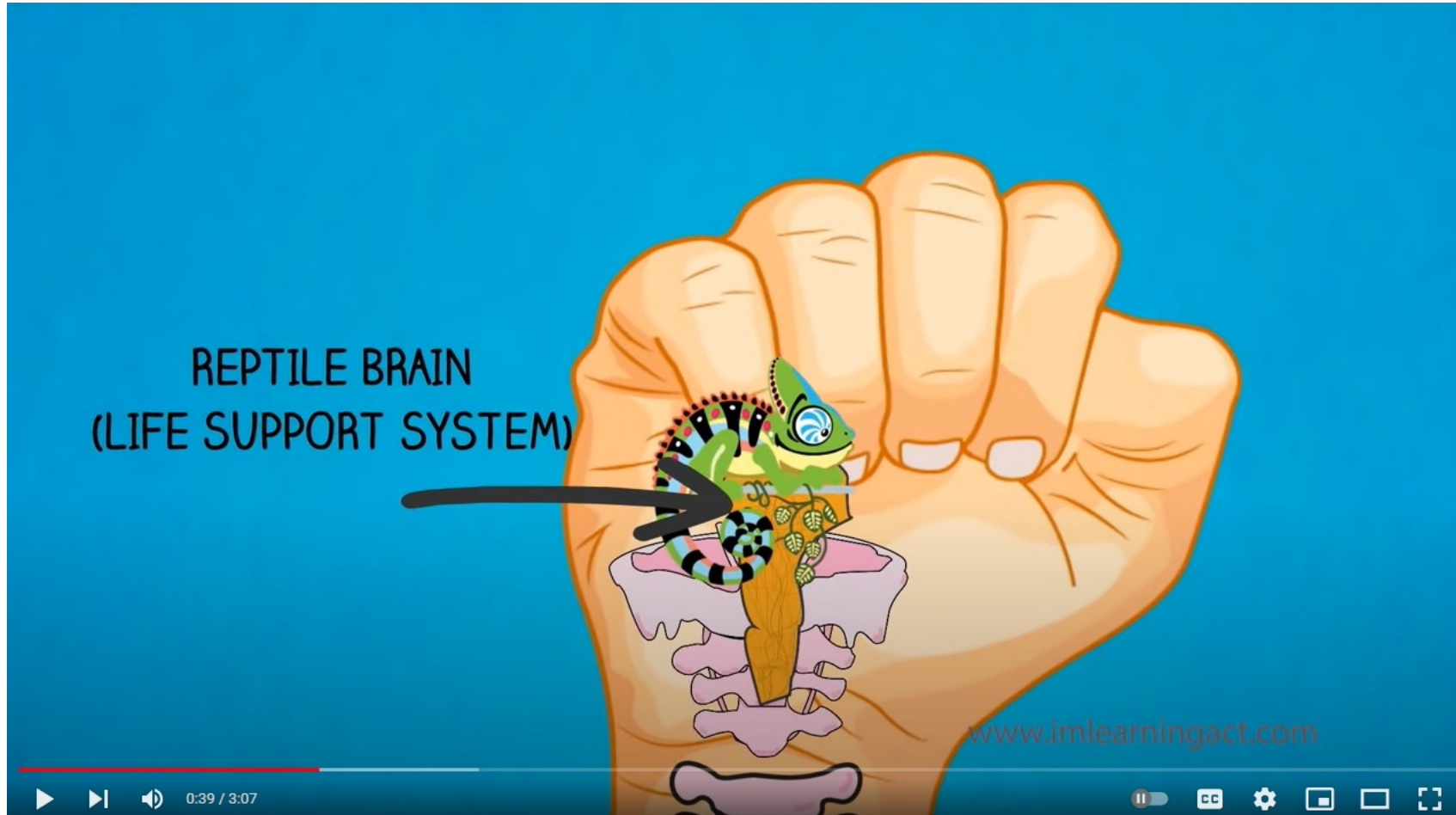
Brain/Body Factors

- How are the brain and body connected?
- What does brain development look like at different ages?
- How does behaviour in our body reflect what is happening in our brain?

(for more information, see
www.albertafamilywellness.org)



Video- Brain/Body



The Three Main Parts Of Your Brain by Dr. Russ Harris
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5CpRY9-MIHA>

External Awareness- Sensory Processing

Sensory Processing:

“An individual’s ability to organize, integrate, and process sensory information received from inside the body and from the external environment to produce purposeful and goal-directed responses.”

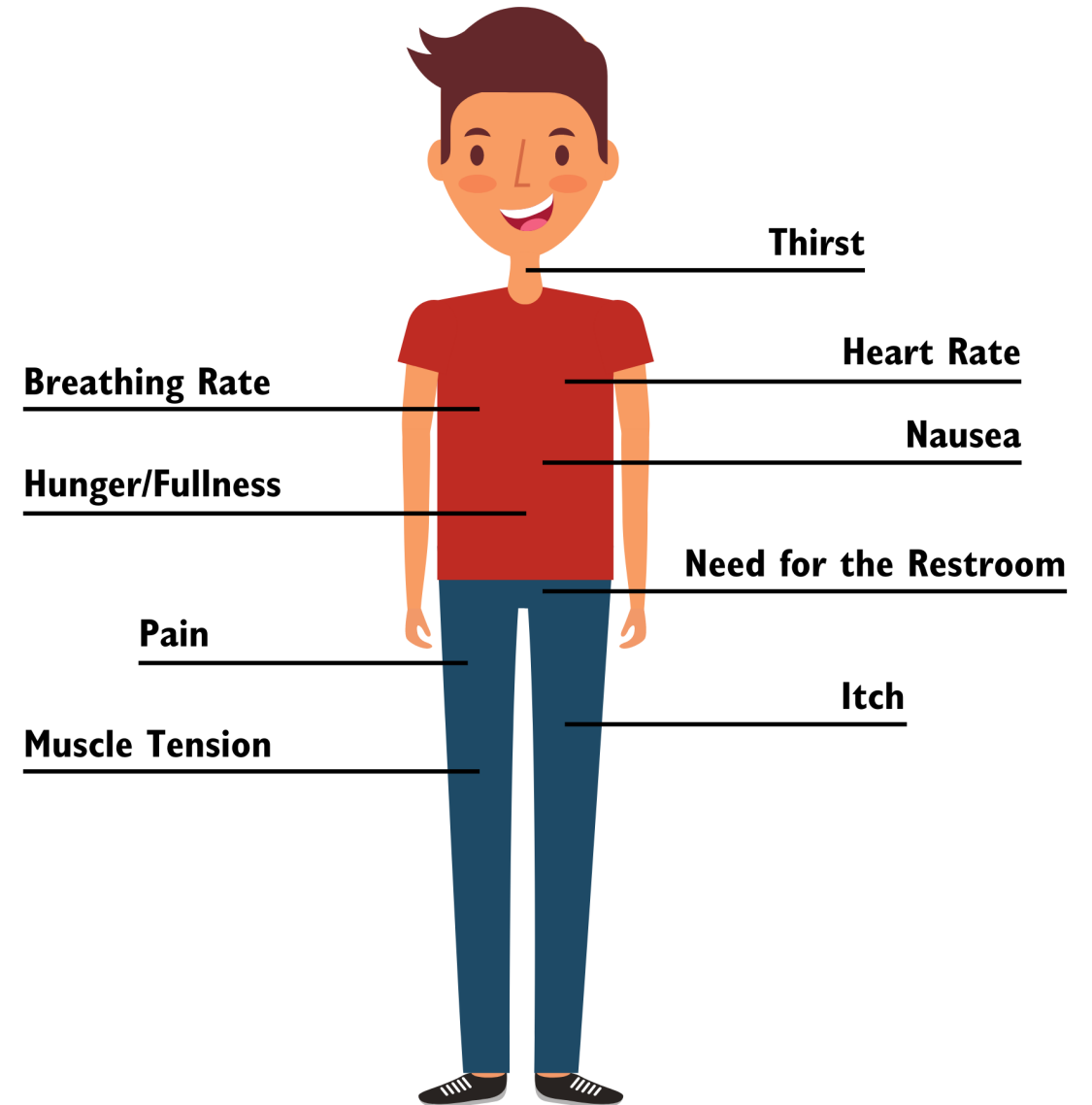
(Reed, 2001)



Internal Awareness- Interoception

Interoception:

“The perception of sensations from inside the body” including the “nervous system activity related to emotions”
(Price and Hooven, 2018)



How does this relate to mental health?

The way our brain and body processes information from our internal and external environments can contribute to feelings of calm or upset in various ways.



Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

- **Be engaged**
- **Be sensitive**
- **Be consistent**
- **Be responsive**
- **Be enjoyable to be with**
- **Be their voice**



Supporting Your Child's Mental Health- Co-Regulation

“Before they can build the capacity for **self-regulation**, children need to have sustained experiences of **emotional co-regulation** with a caring adult or adults.”

- Mona Delahooke



Video- Supporting Your Child's Mental Health- Active Listening



Communication Skills: Empathetic Listening - Inside Out, 2015

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t685VVM5R6aM>

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health- Power of Relationships

**“To the world you may be one person;
but to one person you may be the world.”**

– Dr. Seuss

Supporting Your Child's Mental Health- Next Steps

**Where is your child
at developmentally?**



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