



## **Interoception Program: Whole School Approach to Wellbeing**

Lean C<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department for Education and Child Development*

This presentation will enable participants to develop an understanding of Interoception and its role in self-regulation and connection to self. Additionally, it will enable participants to implement an Interoception program in a school or preschool, including special school settings. This is based on a year trial in 2017 from the Whyalla Partnership in regional South Australia based on Dr Emma Goodall's prior research.

Interoception is our eighth sense. It refers to our perceptions of what is going on inside our bodies. It is responsible for feelings of hunger, thirst, sickness, pain, having to go to the bathroom, tiredness, temperature, itch and other internal sensations. Interoception helps develop our connection to self, as when we understand how we feel, we learn to connect to ourselves and connect to others.

The Whyalla Partnership participated in a training with the DECD Senior Autism Advisor, Dr Emma Goodall who provided sites with a variety of Interoception activities. An Interoception activity can be any activity that changes your body state whilst you notice how your body feels. This could cover muscles, temperature, breathing and pulse.

Each site made an agreement that each class would participate in an Interoception activity, twice a day, especially after break times to refocus and settle students. Some sites have also chosen to open an Interoception room as well. These rooms often also include common calming sensory techniques, such as, repetitive rhythmic vestibular input, heavy work activities and extra activities such as yoga.

An example of the Interoception program success is at Whyalla's Memorial Oval Primary School. In 6 weeks of opening the Interoception room called "The Nest" – 272 student visits were recorded. From this, comparing the EDSAS behaviour data from Term 1 to Term 2 2017, a 67% decrease in behavioural incidents were recorded through the implementation of Interoception activities and "The Nest".

Overall, DECD research indicates that the act of interoception - noticing aspects of one's body can have a profound effect within 8-10 weeks with decreasing heart rate during the interoception activity, decreasing externalising challenging behaviours, increase engagement in learning and increases prosocial behaviours. Over 16+ weeks the Interoception program can help decrease stress, can help manage anxiety and promotes caring and empathy.