



Fidgets and Stimming: Okay or No Way

Overview

Learning Objectives:

After you read this powerpoint, you should be able to

- Differentiate between fidgets and stimming
- Discuss current thinking on stimming
- Offer considerations for fidget use

Stimming

- The need to self-stimulate or seek sensory input to stay focused, calm, and make easier transitions from one activity to another
- Stimming might or might not be dependent on place and activities
- Influenced by what is going on around them, including the presence of others

Fidgets

- Fidgets often accompany stimming
- The need to use an object when stimming is called a fidget
- Can calm anxiety and increase self-regulation
- Some want to change the name to “focus tool”
- A fidget spinner is one of the most well known and popular fidgets

Science of Stimming

- For a long time, autistic people engaged in all kinds of *physical* behaviors known as stimming
- Research articles describe the science of stimming by using the following categories & descriptions:
 - *subtle behaviors*- the little stims you might not even notice
 - *spatial variance*- certain types of stimming being associated with certain places
 - *social cues*
 - *mixing behaviors*- such as moving from spinning to arm flapping
 - *object influence*- that's the fidget part
 - *person anxiety*- such as when the stimming increases in response to someone else's anxiety about it
 - *context stimming*- as in during certain TV shows or games

What Does Research Say?

- Ledford in 2020 investigated if it would be beneficial for autistic students to use small fidgets during group activities with the intention of encouraging attendance and engagement
- **Proved to be unhelpful- fidgets created a distraction for the students and their classmates**
- This study echoed a 2017 report by a team lead by Schecter who acknowledged the popularity of fidgets but **found little evidence to support their use** – and even cautioned that some **fidgets can be choking hazards!**

What Does Research Say?

- Biel in 2017, **reported teacher satisfaction with some fidgets**
- Internet blogs continue to report their effective use and note that **neurotypical people are emulating the habits of autistic people when they stim or use fidgets**
- Interestingly, some sites even mention the old classroom chewing gum controversy as a form of fidget use
- Overall, conflicting views on the use of fidgets

Final Takeaways

- It's safe to say that given the wide range of opinions about stimming, and more specifically, using fidgets, conflicting information is not going away any time soon.
- Fidgets can include **sensory mats, chew toys, gooshy things like slime, rainmaker toys, spinners, and vibrating cushions.**
- Make an informed decision when you think about using fidgets – and factor in considerations of place, people, and activities when you do.



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