

Fidgets—Tools that Take Away Stress!

Fidgets are objects we touch or “play with” when we experience good or bad stress. We also fidget with different items when we have restless or nervous energy. Fidgets can be toys, games, or everyday things such as pens, jewellery, or pocket change.

Moving, or manipulating, these objects helps us manage stress from different situations because the movement helps regulate, or balance out, our sensory systems. While it might seem like fidgets are distracting, they actually take care of “antsy” behaviour—making us more relaxed and evening out our energy levels.

Fidgeting is a normal behaviour for children and adults, and most everyone fidgets to some degree. We often fidget when we are trying to concentrate or pass time, and we may switch from one fidget to another depending on the stress level. Some common examples of fidgeting include biting nails, tapping a foot, twirling hair, and chewing on a pencil. Some common situations for fidgeting include talking on the phone, listening to a presentation, or riding in the car. In school, children may feel stress and fidget when struggling to come up with an answer, when getting ready to accept an award, or after sitting for a long period of time.

Sometimes, individuals show inappropriate or socially unacceptable fidgeting. These behaviours include biting hands, picking the nose, and chewing on clothes. In the school setting, teachers may work with children to find more socially-acceptable fidgeting behaviours or replacement behaviours. Replacement behaviours often include using objects that are common, less distracting (no lights or noises), and more hygienic. Teachers may also use fidgets to help children regulate their sensory systems throughout the day, which can lead to better focus, attention, and listening for tasks. As well, children with certain diagnoses, such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), may especially benefit from the sensory feedback of fidgets.

Examples of Fidgets come in different sizes, shapes, weights, and textures. These different characteristics provide different pressures and sensations to the nervous system.

Some fidgets are for the hands; these include stress balls, therapy putty, clay, pencil grips, zippers, beanbags, gloves, bracelets, hand-held games or toys, and drawing/notepads.

Other fidgets are for the mouth: These include gum, plastic key chains without the metal ring, chewing tubes, and suckers.

Foot fidgets; include foot rests/massagers and resistance bands.

If you are thinking of fidgets for your child you need to

- Check fidget(s) is age-appropriate
- Check what they can or cannot take/use in the school environment
- At home, be sure to provide guidance and supervision when using fidgets as tools with your children.

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