



Fidgets



Co-Convenors of Bendigo Autistic Advocacy and Support Service (BAASS) have created this informative resource to support acceptance and insight into the use of fidgets, including spinners, cubes and many others available based on the preferences of the person.

Although the term 'fidgets' is widely known and used to identify therapeutic sensory tools, there is still a reluctance and misguided negativity associated with the term which induces some to dismiss or not take the sensory needs behind 'fidgeting', seriously.

The primary objective of fidgets is in context the of stimming (self-stimulatory behaviour). Stimming is a natural response to cope with overwhelming emotions and is also a coping mechanism in relation to sensory overload. As a crucial component of self-regulation, stimming assists in feeling confident, safe, calm and connected- of which is essential for learning. One way many of us stim is by using fidgets.

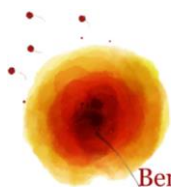
Fidgets, including fidget spinners can be a crucial aspect of facilitating meaningful engagement and learning. In our personal and professional experience, we all understand the importance of fidgets for autistic people (and many others) and are very aware that it can be a challenge to find the right fidget, for the right person.

Often, finding the right fidget to fit the person and their specific needs, can be significantly challenging. This can involve trialing many different fidgets at significant cost and can take quite some time to find something right for the person. Finding the right fidget for the person is paramount.

Conflicting needs within the same space can also be challenging in the choice of and access to fidgets and all needs should be considered carefully and creatively to enable each person to utilise the right therapeutic sensory tool (fidget) for them. There are many ways to incorporate flexibility and creativity in the approach to providing an inclusive environment and supporting each individual person's choice of what works and feels best for them.

We promote autonomy and respect for human rights and strongly believe the right to determine what feels right and benefits any given person- lies with that person. We fully respect the rights of all children within classrooms and those of teachers and parents in supporting and guiding children.

We certainly understand the difficulty teachers may experience in a sudden influx of fidgets- whichever way they are utilised. However, fidgets are an essential component of self-regulating and learning for many, and although a definitive report or correspondence from a specialist can



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reinforce this, it should not be necessary for this basic need and therapeutic resource. Further to this, there are other disabilities that people experience that mean fidgets are beneficial for them

and there are many undiagnosed people, for various reasons- including children. To limit the use of chosen fidgets to a particular community is not helpful for many others that may benefit by using them. To restrict or disallow the use of fidgets/a particular fidget for all students, is to discriminate on the basis of disability in denying a reasonable adjustment, protected by law, to enable students to participate in the school curriculum and environment in as close to the same basis as their peers. There are ways to facilitate each person's safe and meaningful access to fidgets without disrupting others that may find it distracting.

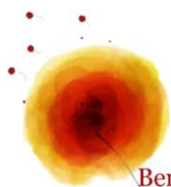
History clearly exemplifies the mercurial basis of new popular activities and like any new resource or strategy introduced, requires support and gradual time to settle. The knee-jerk reaction to banning something because it proves somewhat challenging, is to limit and curb participation, wellbeing and learning. We believe incorporation, not restriction, is the key, allowing time for any 'phase' component to settle which; facilitates a necessary support for many, normalises the use of fidgets- as it should be, and is a wonderful learning tool in the interim.

There are ways to incorporate spinner fidgets in positive and respectful ways, to maximise potential, learning and wellbeing. Identifying the real reason behind the motivation for banning something and working around that is a much more reasonable and beneficial approach. Interestingly and conversely- periods of distraction, irritation and frustration on the part of others in response to fidget spinners, could be akin to a very slight example of the experience of many who are unable to stim, using their preferred method.

Self-regulation is a very important tool in not only learning, but navigating the world and maintaining good health. Children often do attempt to 'self-regulate' but if it is in ways different to general expectations, their attempts to self-regulate can be misconstrued and restricted- resulting in distressed, overwhelmed and anxious children. Distress and anxiety affects verbal communication and may present as behaviours interpreted as 'acting out', agitation, self-harm and violence towards others. This often instigates a cycle of judgement and often consequences- commonly punitive measures implemented to control and inherently force compliance.

Some reasoning behind the call to ban specific fidgets and 'fads' has been the outcry that children are using them as toys. We know that *playing is learning*- one of the most important forms of learning. Banning fidgets also has an element of judgement, it is crucial to bear in mind that autistic ways of doing things will often look different to others.

We need to remember that when it comes to children, we can't expect children to utilise something they love, a certain way, 100% of the time. The learning involved in using fidgets- as fidgets **or** playing- is brilliant and meaningful.



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For example, using a spinner fidget not only enables many to self-regulate, focus, learn, calm/regulate etc. but also can involve:

Autonomy and wellbeing

Fine motor coordination and hand-eye coordination

Counting, timing, numbers, function of time, maths

Spatial awareness

Physics

Mental rotation

Movement

Cause and effect



Patterns and predictions

Angular velocity, linear velocity, gravity and balance

Rotational kinematics

Sound

Acceleration, friction

History (research, curiosity, spinners, wheels, action, invention, use, evolution)

Creativity and imagination

Language, vocabulary, verbal comprehension

Interaction, social and language skills

Many children and adults have extended this to making their own spinner fidgets out of a variety of materials. This in itself is an invaluable learning experience. This facilitates:

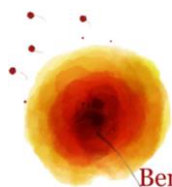
The above and including: construction, engineering, problem solving, using variety of equipment/materials, analysis, lateral thinking, design, dimensions, planning, divergent thinking, social and language skills,

The list could go on! So why would anyone want to curb that?

Some other crucial considerations to remember with fidgeting and fidget tools:

- refrain from setting limits on time, frequency or location and
- unless the child expressly wishes to, avoid using fidgets, interests and passions as rewards, motivators or in any way to encourage a child to do something someone else wants them to do.

To limit fidgets as above is counterproductive and can have significant consequences on a child's wellbeing, ability to practice and learn self-regulation, learn in ways meaningful for them, will impact on trust and self-esteem and is not fair on the child. Most of us would not be impressed if someone tried to restrict something essential to our wellbeing and function, or to dictate how we engage in our passions. To use a person's passionate interests to convince them to participate in an activity they don't want to, find difficult or painful (please don't dismiss refusal because often you will only observe 'refusal' and will not know which of these is the case) and is a form of coercion which detracts from meaningful learning.



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Please always remember eye contact is not necessary for listening. Focusing on a fidget can assist many to listen, concentrate and self-regulate. There are a lot of expectations placed on autistic people within environments such as school and work and many of them unrealistic and contrary to their needs and way of being.

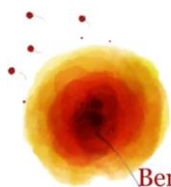
BAASS Co-Convenors are passionate about supporting all autistic people and stakeholders and can be available at mutually convenient opportunities, to support schools, students and families incorporating fidgets or other disability related information and resources.

We very much advocate for the inclusion and value of autistic voices as the primary source of information around strategies and supports for autistic people and our wellbeing.

We offer consultancy, PD and development of individualised resources for autistic children and adults. Some of our resources include a fidget implementation visual guide for students including a section on implementation for teachers, visual schedules and recommendations, visual guides for any occasion as relevant to the person and so on.

Please see the appendix for some helpful resources/information on stimming and fidget/sensory tools along with information on the authors.

Note this is not an exhaustive list but a selection of valuable and authentic information.



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Appendix.

Amethyst Schaber of 'Neurowonderful'

Ask an Autistic #1 - What is Stimming? <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WexCWZPJE6A>

Michelle Sutton

Barriers to learning for autistic people and how you can help.

<https://michellesuttonwrites.com/infographics/barrierstolearning/>

How to support an autistic child in the classroom.

<https://michellesuttonwrites.com/infographics/206-2/>

Tips for teachers supporting neurodivergent students.

<https://michellesuttonwrites.com/infographics/tips-for-teachers-supporting-neurodivergent-students/>

Sarah Kurchak

<https://theestablishment.co/all-the-wrong-people-are-asking-all-the-wrong-questions-about-fidget-spinners-9356c496b599>

THINKING PERSON'S GUIDE TO AUTISM

Autism news and resources: from autistic people, professionals, and parents. Aiyana Bailin

<http://www.thinkingautismguide.com/2017/05/what-fidget-spinners-fad-reveals-about.html?m=1>

CHILD'S PLAY. Mary McCool, The Scottish Sun

Expert slams ban on fidget spinners in Scotland's schools as teachers may 'not understand' autism health benefits.

<https://www.thescottishsun.co.uk/news/995413/fidget-spinners-what-parents-should-know-soothing-autism-adhd-school-ban/>

Rachel Cave

All the rage: Are spinner toys a useful concentration tool or bad distraction?

<http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/new-brunswick/spinner-toys-schools-new-brunswick-1.4096445>