

Sensory Processing Fidgets

What is a “fidget toy”?

“Fidget toys” are a small object or toy that can be easily manipulated or ‘fidgeted’ with. They are also often referred to as “stress toys”. Fidget toys frequently provide proprioceptive sensory input, and help us to stay calm and alert. As adults we doodle, flip things in our hands, and we do this to keep our brain thinking better. This is the same idea as a fidget toy.

Fidgets have particular properties that intrigue our sensory systems. For example:

- Interesting tactile composition, such as squeezable or spiky
- Heaviness or pliability
- Small enough to keep in your pocket
- Provide movement opportunities for our hands (e.g. it can be squeezed).

How to use a “fidget toy”

- Anything can be a distraction when it’s new. Wait until the novelty has worn off (e.g. 7-10 days) before judging the effectiveness.
- Introduce fidgets with clear rules, for example when it can be used, where it is kept.
- Fidget toys can be particularly useful when a child is required to sit and pay attention, or during times of waiting. For example: during group discussions, lining up with peers, in the car or on the bus.
- Be aware of safety issues. Elastic bands and paper clips can be good fidgets for adults but could cause injury with children.
- If a child tends to put things in his/her mouth, avoid giving fidgets that could be toxic if chewed/sucked, and avoid anything that could be swallowed.
- Try to involve your child in choosing a fidget item, as different textures appeal to different people. Sometimes it can help to have a “fidget box” with a selection of fidgets which your child can choose from.
- For children who like to fidget at the desk, a fidget item can be attached to their chair or to their desk.

“Fidget toy” examples

- Stress ball – alternate between hands. (These can be purchased from most toy shops)
- Small animals or gooey fidgets (have a look at the National Geographic shops for ideas)
- Sensory Tools (www.sensorytools.net) have a range of fidget resources, including fidget kits (click on the fidget tab).
- Theraband – try some of your local sports shops. It may also be called pilates or yoga band
- Wikki Sticks – available on the Sensory Tools website



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