



8. Stimming and Self-Regulation at School

Spotlight on
Supporting Autistic
Girls and Gender
Diverse Students
at School

Stimming (short for self-stimulatory behaviour) is the repetition of physical movements, sounds, words or the repetitive movement of objects. Stimming is a form of communication, body language and self-regulatory behaviour for autistic people. Autistic young people might be stimming for emotional regulation, sensory and attention differences, as a way of reducing distractions in their environment, and as a source of joy. Stimming can be obvious (e.g., loud vocalisations or flapping), or it can be subtle movements that can be easily missed (e.g., biting nails, tapping feet, twirling hair). If an autistic student is stimming in class, chances are they are doing what they can to stay regulated and to help them pay attention.

Tips on Supporting Stimming as a way to Improve Focus and Regulation:



Normalise stimming behaviour

Normalising stimming and the use of sensory accommodations within the classroom. This helps to reduce the stigma traditionally associated with stimming (stimming is not something to be eliminated).



Check in

If you notice your autistic students are stimming, consider what they might be communicating. Some students will stim if they are experiencing big emotions, including anxiety, sadness, worry and excitement. By checking in with your students, you can offer additional supports if they need it.



Provide quiet spaces

Spaces that can be accessed with discretion and dignity when needed.



Modify the environment

Reducing noise and visual clutter can help create calmer classroom environments that better support autistic students in their focus and regulation.



Provide or allow fidget objects

Fidgets come in all sorts of forms and use different body parts and senses to work effectively. Work with the student, or the professionals who support them (e.g., an OT) to understand their stimming needs and which types of fidgets might best meet those needs.



Offer accessible seating options

These can include bean bags, wobble chairs, cushions, standing desks, or fitness balls. Utilising flexible seating options within the classroom has numerous benefits, including allowing students to get the movement and sensory stimuli they need without disrupting others, giving children some control over their learning environment, aiding in focus and attention, and improving the mental and physical wellbeing of students.



Try a class activity

An activity where all students can try out different fidgets and sensory accommodations can be a great way to normalise the use of stimming aides and accommodations, and reduce the stigma that may exist around the use of fidget tools and different ways of moving the body.

Further reading on this topic: [Spotlight on Autistic and ADHD Minds](#)
[[Spotlight on Autistic and ADHD Minds \(Physical copy\)](#)]
– [Yellow Ladybugs](#)