

Don't Ban the Spinners – Teach Kids about Fidgeting and the Brain!

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Have you seen them yet? They are small objects that kids spin around with their fingers like a pinwheel and they come in lots of different patterns and colors. Kids are having a blast seeing the different ways they can spin them on their bodies, and battling who can make theirs spin the longest. Many parents are reporting that their kids are spending less time

on their smartphones as their hands are kept busy with the spinners. Some kids are noticing that they can focus better when their hands are occupied. So, what's the problem? ***They can create a big distraction.*** As a result, some schools are now banning the use of Spinners in classrooms.

"But I finally had a way to fit in!"

Kids who have ADHD have been encouraged to fidget for years as a way to help them focus and control their constant movement. Now that there is a tool they can actually use and seem like a cool kid – they are having to give them up along with everyone else. Why? Because many kids are becoming distracted while using them or by others who are playing with them.

Use as a Tool – not Toy!

For years, through my Teacher Training and Parent Coaching, I have been educating adults about the *value of fidgeting* and encouraging them to teach children the same. I have asked that teachers keep a box of fidgets in their classrooms so that those who benefit from movement can do so without fear of shame or embarrassment. And it works. Here is what I teach:

Teach ALL kids that everyone's brain works differently. *Fact* – some people are able to focus better when they move. You should know that for people with ADHD, there is a consistent pattern of below-normal levels of the neurotransmitters Dopamine and Norepinephrine in the brain's prefrontal cortex, which contribute to maintaining alertness, increasing focus, and sustaining thought, effort, and motivation – but you don't need to explain that to the kids. My goal is to not put a spotlight on "those" kids. They have enough spotlight on them already. I want to normalize the need for different styles of learning, not make it hierarchal as if one is better than the other. It's *how* we learn to manage our differences that is important.

Demonstrate "fidgeting in the background." I hold up a long rubber stick (you can see what it looks like in my article ["Can't You Just Sit Still and Pay Attention?"](#)) and move it in my hands as I speak. I am showing that I can effectively engage in conversation as I move the object without it negatively impacting my ability to speak and listen. The object is my "secondary focus". It's in the background. It's a TOOL that, if I was someone who did struggle because of lower levels of the necessary neurotransmitters, would be very beneficial in activating my brain.

Distinguish if it's being used as a TOY. Then, I demonstrate that if I

start paying attention to the object in my hand, perhaps manipulating that long rubber stick with intention to make it into a pretzel, then I am no longer fidgeting, I am PLAYING. The object has become my “primary focus”.

The fidgeting cannot be Distracting to others or Destructive. Next, I start tapping my rubber stick on the table as I continue to speak. I am showing that I have no trouble holding my thoughts and speaking clearly, however, of course this is distracting – and annoying – to others around me. And if I swing the stick around, I risk knocking things over or hitting others accidentally. I have now clearly demonstrated that there need to be rules and expectations around appropriate fidgeting.

So, what is the take away here? Let’s not ban these Spinners. Nor those Fidget Cubes that some others kids are using. **Use this as a teachable opportunity!** Our goal as educators and parents is to help children learn about themselves and how they can best learn and function in the world. Let them experiment with different tools and techniques. Set your boundaries and expectations. Perhaps they can keep the object out of view of others, using it with their hands in their laps or keeping it in the pocket of their sweatshirt. We want them to know how to best function while in religious settings, in movie theaters, and anywhere else they are around other people. Don’t ban the objects – teach all kids the distinction between Tool and Toy. Let’s celebrate and let kids with ADHD who need movement finally get to do so without stigma.

Other articles on www.PTScoaching.com that discuss Fidgeting:

[Trouble Focusing – Try Fidgeting with Purpose](#)

[Response to Mom: Frustrated at School](#)

[Help a Teacher to Understand a Child](#)