



Using Sensory Toys to Improve Learning and Behaviour

Children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often seek out sensory activities, e.g. chewing, twirling, and fidgeting. They find specific sensory experiences calming, e.g. rocking, flicking, visual patterns, flapping. Holding an object in their hands can often enhance learning. For example, if given a sensory toy to hold at mat time a child can sit for longer, concentrate better, be less disruptive to peers, is calmer and has reduced anxiety levels. Sensory toys can also replace inappropriate behaviours.

Is there one MAGIC WAND to improve learning and behaviour?

So many teachers and parents of children with ASD ask me this question. The simple answer is no, because a combination of strategies is required, but if there was ONE idea that makes a big difference and is so easy to use it would be using what is called a fidget toy. The irony is that it is the strategy that is most resisted by educators.

A small 'fidget toy' in the hand of a majority of children with ASD will dramatically improve their learning and behaviour.

I acknowledge that the idea that playing with a 'toy' improving concentration is the opposite experience for teachers and parents with non-ASD children.

For children with ASD this strategy can be a MAGIC WAND. It calms them, reduces stress, and reduces distractions, therefore increasing learning readiness and promoting good behaviour. Many children with ASD seek movement to calm and process, by allowing the child to actually move their fingers using a "fidget toy" it actually increases learning.

A good indicator of whether a child needs fidget toys is "WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU REMOVE THEM?"

If you remove the toy and you see other behaviours emerge this indicates the child actually "seeks" this and "needs" it. For example, the behaviours you will see could include:

- Will they pick their fingers?
- Will they chew their collar or hat string?
- Will they start moving their legs, body?
- Will they be easily distracted by other children?

Many students with ASD actually listen and concentrate BEST with a sensory toy!

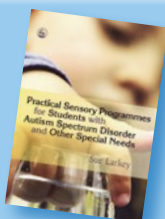
Reminder: Have rules around sensory toys. Have set times they put in their pocket, on desk, in their hands etc.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Practical Sensory Programmes

By Sue Larkey



The Kids' Guide to Staying Awesome and In Control

By Lauren Brukner



Behaviour Solutions

By Beth Aune, Beth Burt and Peter Gennaro

