

SEND & INCLUSION · ALL GRADES

Fidget Tools

Which ones, when, and how

The basic principle

A fidget is not a toy. A fidget should engage the hands or body QUIETLY and INVISIBLY enough to free the brain to focus on something else. For children with ADHD, autism, anxiety, sensory needs, or just ordinary squirminess, the right fidget can be the difference between completing a piece of work and not. The wrong fidget — anything visually or auditorily distracting — is just a distraction with a fancy name.

Fidgets that usually work

Type	Why it works	Best for
Tangle / chain	Continuous, repetitive, silent	Most children
Putty / Theraputty	Resistance, kneading	Sensory seekers
Worry stones / smooth pebble	Tactile, calming	Anxiety
Velcro under desk	Hidden, satisfying	Tactile, ADHD
Wobble cushion (on chair)	Provides movement without standing	ADHD, sensory
Chewable necklace	Oral input	Oral seekers
Fidget ring	Discreet, always available	Older children

Fidgets that usually fail



Type	Why not
Fidget spinners	Visual distraction, social currency, become toys
Pop-its	Sound disrupts everyone else
Squeezy stress balls	Often too big and obvious; become sport
Anything that lights up	Visual distraction
Anything that makes noise	Disrupts class
Anything 'cool'	Becomes social capital, not regulation

How to introduce a fidget tool

TO ONE CHILD: 1. Privately. 'I notice it's hard to sit still. Some children find this helps.' 2. Demonstrate. Use it yourself for a moment. 3. Set clear expectations. 'In your hand, under the desk. Not waved around. Not shared.' 4. Trial period. 'Try it for a week. If it doesn't help, we'll try something else.' 5. Check in privately. TO THE WHOLE CLASS: If you have a basket of fidgets available to all, frame it as: 'These are tools that can help some people focus. If you'd like to try one, you can. If anyone is being disruptive with one, the tool goes back.'

Handling 'I want one too'

Other children will see a peer with a fidget and ask for one. This is a common worry but easily handled. • Have a few available so it isn't 'special.' • Frame it factually: 'These help some people focus. If you'd like to try one too, take one.' • Watch what happens. Most children try it for 5 minutes, find it boring, and put it back. The children for whom it actually helps will keep using it quietly. • If a child uses it as a toy, the tool goes back. Calmly, no drama. The alternative — making the fidget a gatekept 'special tool only Sam can have' — creates resentment and shame. Universal access prevents this.

When fidgets aren't working

If a child has a fidget but their behaviour is still disruptive: • Is it the wrong fidget? (Switch.) • Is it being used as a toy, not a tool? (Pause and reset expectations.) • Is the underlying issue not regulation but something else? (Boredom, lack of understanding, social struggle, hunger, anxiety.) • Is the lesson too long for their attention span? (Maybe they need a movement break.) Fidgets are one tool among many. They're not magic.

