



# Autism Tip Sheet

From the Elida School District Autism Team

## Stimming: What is a Teacher to do?

Stimming is almost always a symptom of autism, but it's important to note that stimming is almost always a part of every human being's behavior pattern. If you've ever tapped your pencil, bitten your nails, twirled your hair or paced, you've engaged in stimming. The biggest differences between autistic and typical stimming are (1) the choice of stim and (2) the quantity of stim. While it's at least moderately acceptable to bite one's nails, for example, it's absolutely unacceptable to wander around flapping one's hands. There's really no good reason why flapping should be less acceptable than nail biting (it's certainly more hygienic!). But in our world, the hand flappers receive negative attention while the nail biters are tolerated.

Like anyone else, people with autism stim to help themselves to manage anxiety, fear, anger, and other negative emotions. Like many people, people with autism may stim to help themselves handle overwhelming sensory input (too much noise, light, heat, etc.). Some common stimming actions include flapping hands, making vocal sounds, scratching or rubbing the skin, and rocking.

Unlike most people, though, individuals with autism may also self-stimulate constantly, and stimming may well stand between them and their ability to interact with others, take part in ordinary activities, or even be included in typical classrooms. A child who regularly needs to pace the floor or slap himself in the head is certain to be a distraction for typical students.

It's not completely clear why stimming almost always goes with autism, though it's often called

a tool for "self-regulation." As such, it may well be an outgrowth of the sensory processing dysfunction that often goes along with autism. At times, stimming can be a useful accommodation - making it possible for the autistic person to manage challenging situations. When it becomes a distraction or causes physical harm to self or others, though, it must be modified.

### **How to Manage Stimming in the Classroom**

What can a teacher do to manage stimming behavior in the classroom? First, it is best for students with autism to be in a structured and calm environment. A chaotic classroom is particularly stressful for these students. Try to help the child with ASD cope by placing him in a quieter area next to kids who are calm. The teacher will also need to keep her own emotions in check.

Second, helping a student find a replacement for loud or disruptive stimming behavior is not easy, but can be effective as well. For example, if a child orally stimulates with clicking noises, he/she may find a more acceptable soothing technique is to chew on something like fruit gummies or crunchy carrots.

Sources and Additional Information:

- 1) [Autism - Wiki](#)
- 2) [How to Manage Stimming in Classroom](#)