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Fidget to Focus

Doing two things at once can enhance focus and improve performance for ADHD kids and adults. Learn how.

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What Is a Fidget?

Experts believe that engaging in an activity that uses a sense other than what's required for your primary task — listening to music while reading a social studies textbook, for example — can enhance focus and improve performance in children with attention deficit disorder. These secondary tasks are called **fidgets** — mindless activities you can do while working on a primary task.

Fidget Effectively

Fidgeting must be deliberate to be effective. Intentional fidgets allow you and your child to self-regulate ADHD symptoms in a controlled, constructive fashion. An effective fidget doesn't distract you from your primary task because it is something you don't have to think about. Use these fidget secrets the next time you or your ADHD child needs help focusing.

Walk and Talk

When your ADHD child gets restless and tunes out an important conversation, try walking and talking. Any non-strenuous activity, like playing catch or doing a jigsaw puzzle together, will also work. This is a powerful strategy for talking over your child's day or communicating with your ADHD partner about an important matter.

Stand Up and Move Around

Talk with the teacher about small school accommodations like letting your child stand, when appropriate, during the school day. A child can do this discreetly at the back of the room or at his desk. Some teachers let restless kids be message runners and send them off on errands.

If you can't focus in a meeting at work, use a coffee break or a visit to the washroom as an excuse to stand.

Go Ahead, Doodle

A creative learning trick is to encourage your child to draw or write words or numbers when listening to a teacher's lecture (just make sure he doesn't doodle on the desk). Doodling will also help ADHD adults focus when they're on a long phone call with a client or are in an endless, boring meeting.

Use Colored Pencils and Pens

This fidget works well when your child needs to complete an assignment or read for comprehension (he can underline words as he reads). Scented markers may also help.

Busy His Hands

This facilitates focus when a child is listening, talking, or thinking about how to answer a tough essay question. Fidget toys for school or home include cool-looking pens or pencils, beaded bracelets, paper clips, and clothes with interesting textures or doodads.

For adults at work, a small, smooth stone—a worry rock—in your pocket will allow you to fiddle without your boss or colleagues knowing.

Tune In

Plugging into an MP3 player helps children stay on task when studying, reading, exercising, or even going to sleep. Choose music that is appropriate to the task: a stimulating beat when exercising, calming tunes for sleep, and something in between when studying or reading.

At the office, use this strategy on days when you are working at the computer and have little interaction with colleagues.

Chew Gum

This helps your child when he has to concentrate for an extended period—doing homework or taking a test. Chewing gum in the office is effective when writing a memo or having to slog through a week's worth of e-mail. If gum is not an option, sucking on a lemon drop or other hard candy will also do the trick.

Try It Out

Managing ADHD involves recognizing our choices and taking action. Understanding what is going on in our brains and proactively choosing an appropriate strategy is the essence of the fidget approach. Experiment with a variety of strategies and encourage your child to try different fidgets. Remember that your favorite fidget may not work for him.