

What is it?

Stimming, or self-stimulating behaviour, can include arm and hand flapping, rocking, jumping, spinning, head banging, and many other body movements or sounds. It can include the repetitive use of a favoured object, such as twirling a piece of string, the continuous use of the same words/sounds, or repetitive activities using one or more of the senses.



Stimming varies from person to person but is usually seen for the following reasons:

- For enjoyment
- To gain sensory input – licking for oral stimulation, rocking for vestibular input
- To reduce sensory input – focusing on one thing to reduce the impact of what is happening around them
- To cope with anxiety or a stressful situation

Should it be stopped?

Stimming is often enjoyable and can be an expression of joy and happiness, it can also be a way for children to reduce stress if they are feeling over stimulated. It should not be stopped or reduced. However, if a child is engaging in a stimming behaviour that is self-injurious such as head-banging it may be necessary to support them to stop or redirect the behaviour to one that meets their needs without hurting themselves.

Examples of stimming behaviours

- Visual: Staring out of the corners of eyes, moving objects in front of their eyes
- Auditory: Repeating words and phrases from programmes, making repeated vocal sounds
- Tactile: Rubbing fingers against textured objects
- Vestibular: Spinning, hand flapping, tip toe walking
- Taste: Licking objects, putting edible and non-edible items in their mouth
- Smell: Smelling objects or people

Strategies to support stimming behaviours

- Flapping hands – fidget toys, engaging in fine/gross motor activities
- Spinning – ring game, sensory circuit, swings in park
- Smelling others – smell jars, naturally smelly objects
- Chewing toys or licking – personal chew fidget, oral exercises
- Repeated words or phrases from favourite programme – activities of interest, model new language
- Head banging – pillows, padded areas, use of soft protective helmet,