

## **Possibilities to Help Students Deal With Stress and Anxiety, Manage Anger and Build Confidence**

### **Part 1**

12:45-2:15

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### **Helping Students Move From Reaction to Action**

We can't change a child's previous experiences or current situation but we do have the power to make the best of the time they are with us.

We can show children strategies so they can learn to deal with challenging situations and move from reaction to action.

### **Givens**

We know that students sometimes 'act out' their stress and anxiety with fidgeting, moving and other behaviours that impact learning for themselves and others.

You probably have created calm spaces for kids and have fidgets and self regulation friendly seating. Check out, [northstarpaths.com](http://northstarpaths.com).

Go to [longstoryshortz](http://longstoryshortz) for wonderful stop motion videos.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1eZ7h6u3JM>

Their videos are also great for sharing with families.

## **Creating Supportive Environments and Routines to Help Students Deal With Anxiety**

### **Guidelines**

Ready made rules can elicit the response, Rules are made to be broken."

Guidelines take care of 99% of the rules most classrooms (and homes) have but are more effective.

I tell students of all ages that we each have 3 jobs:

**"It is my job:**

**to do everything I can do to keep you safe,**

**help you do your own learning**

**and help make this a place where everyone can learn.**

**It is you job:**

**to be safe,**

**do everything you can do to learn**

**and support other people in their learning."**

### **Making Sitting More Self Regulation 'Friendly'**

For some students a 'sit cushion,' a semi-inflated rubber chair cushion with bumps which provide sensory input can literally give some wiggle room -- giving the feeling of movement without disruption. Many students who need to move find all-in-one desk-and-chair furniture challenging and sometimes have problems because rocking the chair results in rocking the whole desk. A desk with a separate chair may be safer. If there are funds available there are chairs that rock, desks that allow students to stand or have built in fidgets. It is possible to wrap the bottom legs of a standard chair with Thera-band, inner tubing or rubber tubing. The student can push against the band and gain some movement without providing a distraction for others. Some teachers put 3 tennis balls or felt sliders on the legs of the chair to cause a small amount of unevenness so the student get movement.

\* Bicycle Stores will often give you free tubing for classroom use.

### **Sit or Stand**

Many students can be much more able to be focussed and alert if they can stand. When I observe students who have difficulty focussing while sitting we have a conversation about trying standing at a table or desk to work but I make it clear that their part is to be engaged in their assignment or activity. An area of desks or tables where students can stand without getting in the way of other people helps some students to be more productive. Some teachers have clipboards for students who are better working on the floor.

### **Arranging for Focus**

Many teachers have had great success in helping students be more focussed during discussions and during independent work time by arranging the furniture so that students are looking at each other. Betty a university instructor has her students arrange their chairs in a circle so students make eye contact and leave phones 'stowed' during class. Despite a very small class room Jen arranged her intermediate students' work spaces in a rectangle with a space for movement in the center. The feeling of being in a 'public space' led students to be more courteous to each other. She observed that when students could see each other during independent work times so they tended to be more engaged in their own projects.

## **Fidget Tools**

Many educators have fidget tools available for students. I have been collecting things that students can use to keep their focus. We make it clear that these are tools and need to be treated as a tool rather than a toy. I look for **tools students can use without risk of embarrassment**. For older students I've collected various rings and bracelets that are inconspicuous. When students are listening it may work for them to doodle or use modeling materials. When we began introducing the use of fidget tools responding to questions like, "Why does he get to have that?" "Isn't she just playing?" or "Couldn't he just pay attention like the 'other kids' do?" came up.

We needed to have conversations about why some of us can be better learners when we have something to handle or do that keeps us more focussed and alert. The important thing is that we reach an agreement that fits with the guidelines of: "We do everything we can do to learn and let other people do their learning."

**"Fair isn't everybody getting the same thing ...  
Fair is about everybody getting what they need to be successful."**

**Arnie and His School Tools, Why Does Izzy Cover Her Ears? Jennifer Veeneland:**

### **Setting Criteria for Fidget Use**

Taking time to set criteria for fidget use is an investment in being productive and sane!

Day 1: Let each student choose a fidget and give students a chance to use them while you do an activity such as reading to the group. Talk about what was working and not working.

Show: Fidget Video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1eZ7h6u3JM> Longstoryshortz

Day 2: Ask: "What's important when we use fidgets?" List students' suggestions.

Day 2: Re-read brainstorm list and have students pick one thing to work on while using fidgets.

Day 3: Tell students a list is too long.

Our brain remembers 5 things + or - two. Sort the list and label the categories.

Day 4: Post List. Read categories. talk to kids about what is working. Daily: Do a quick criteria review before beginning activities.

Note: If kids are using fidgets in a distracting way rather than taking the fidget away from them I try for a conversation where we talk about what's working and what's not and review the criteria. I give them the choice of using the fidget according to the criteria or trying another fidget.

### **Memory Foam Scraps**

One of the challenges of helping students focus by giving them fidgets is being 'driven to distraction' by students who use fidgets in a way that takes way from learning. One fidget that is free to inexpensive and quiet is MEMORY FOAM. The texture of memory foam is very comforting and it doesn't make noise.. Many foam supply stores will give you scraps to use in class.

### **Tie Ons**

The simple placement of yarn tied around the leg of a chair or desk can make a highly effective fidget tool. Cut 3 pieces of yarn. (approximately 40 cm) Tie around the top of the leg of a desk or chair or simply put out yarn on desks or tables. It makes a silent and fairly unobtrusive fidget. Macrame bracelets, RAINBOW LOOM bracelets and elastic hair ties also make great fidgets.

### **Spinner or Meditation Rings**

Spinner or Meditation rings are metal rings made with a piece that spins around the outside of the inner ring. I got one in Stainless steel for under \$10.00. Amazon is the best source I've found for inexpensive rings. B.C. Ferries often has spinner rings near the cash desk for \$9.99.

### **Acupressure Rings**

Acupressure Rings are small metal rings made of little triangular shaped points that stimulate fingers and can help concentration. They are listed on **Amazon**. Most teachers don't have a budget for such items but I found soft pony tail elastics at the \$ Store which make inexpensive, quiet fidget tools. Odin Books in Vancouver carries the rings.

### **Rocks and Shells**

Polished rocks and worn pieces of shell make great fidgets because they can be kept in a pocket and used as the student needs them. Other students find a scrap of soft fabric and excellent claiming device. One parent gave her child a choice of thin, small polished rocks, asked him to carry his choice in his pocket and touch it when things went well. Then she suggested that in times when he felt less confident he could touch to rock to remind himself that he could do many things well.

### **Chew Bands**

Plastic straws and coffee stirrers were used for kids who needed to chew but they can misalign teeth. There are some silicone 'chewies' available and some teachers have tried food safe tubing. For kids who chew clothing a wrist band or top cuff of a small sock makes a less destructive, less obvious.

## **DISCUSSION TIME**

**Head Up, Heart Out**

I heard Sara Wegwitz, 'life coach' and nurse at Uvic, interviewed about her Ted Jr. Talk. She said,

**"The brain believes any story we tell ourselves over and over again."**

"To build confidence: **"Change your physiology to to change you psychology."**

Her mantra is,

**"Head up, heart out."**

She says by walking tall, shoulders down, heart out you feel and look more confident.

When we look confident people treat us differently and we become less of a target for bullies.

Amy Cuddy teaches people to put their hands on their hips and lift their chins while they breathe for and minute or 2.. She says, 'Fake it until you make it' then 'fake it until you become it.' She explains that people who have strong body language are perceived to be more competent. If we practice we gradually become more confident.

Check out the TED TALK by Amy Cuddy

**Laughter Lightens**

We know that we laughter relaxes us. Many classes now add a laughter break during the day. This can be as simple as getting students to demonstrate their favorite phony laughs which soon turn into real laughter.

**Smiling as a Mood Booster**

We know that we can 'cheer ourselves up' by smiling. When we raise the corners of our mouths our brain releases serotonin which makes us feel more positive. We build this into our day with Stop and Smile breaks.

### Using Movement to Help Students Regulate their Energy

#### Cooperative Rock, Paper Scissors

Students stand back to back with a partner.

Show the signs for Rock, Paper Scissors.

When you say, "TURN" partners try to send each other a silent message so they both try to show the same sign.

This results in lots of laughter and all to do it again.

#### Tiger, Alien, Salesperson

Do the Cooperative Rock, Paper Scissors process using the characters listed below.

Tiger: make hands like claws, make snarling tiger face

Alien: put fingers up beside forehead to make antenna

Salesperson: Hand out, eye contact, huge smile.

#### Action Wave

Have students meet in a circle or line.

Demonstrate the wave like fans do at sports events.

Have 1 person do an action which is repeated in a wave pattern around the group until the motion ends up at the person next to the person who started the action.

The next person does another action that goes around the group.

#### Knees, Knees

Knees, knees, shoulders, shoulders, (tap knees then cross hands and tap opposite shoulders)

Knees, knees, shoulders, shoulders, (tap knees then cross hands and tap opposite shoulders)

Knees, 1 shoulder, knees, 1 shoulder, (tap knees then opposite shoulders)

Knees, cross-over, knees, snap (tap knees, cross arms in front and tap opposite knees, then snap fingers)

Brush, brush, (brush hands in front of you)

Elbow, elbow, (tap opposite elbows)

Nod, nod, side, side (nod head 2x then nod to each side)

Wax on, wax off, wax, together. Move one hand in a circular motion then the other. End by circling both hands)

Repeat!!! (I use Build Me Up Buttercup by the Foundations)