

Do Fidget Spinners Belong in the Classroom? Teachers Are Divided

By Kristine Kim on May 11, 2017 6:08 PM

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Fidgets spinners are supposed to help students sit still and focus. But many teachers are saying it's having the exact opposite effect.

Meant to help children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism, anxiety, or other conditions relieve tension and focus better, fidget spinners have become a popular toy among children. But some teachers say they have been causing classroom disruptions, prompting bans and confiscations.

For teachers who haven't seen the recent spinner craze hit their classrooms yet, fidget spinners are small handheld toys that Forbes is calling a "**cure for nervous or bored energy**." The small toy spins in your hand as you twirl the blades.

"A fidget is some type of little toy or little gadget to manipulate in their hand. It calms their sensory system," Tara Yates, an occupational therapist at Advocate Children's Hospital told **the Chicago Tribune**.

But some teachers report that students are comparing their spinners with their friends in class, throwing them around the room, and that students who don't have ADHD or a condition that can make focusing difficult are using them too often during classroom instruction.

Fidgets spinners are the latest version of fidget toys, which have long been used by some behavior specialists to allow students to release stress or anxiety. Those tools include cubes, putties, stress balls, and other little gadgets.

According to Forbes, the fidget toys **aim to remove the shame of fidgeting** and show that it's OK to fidget. But as a flurry of articles in the last week show, some educators still disagree about their place in the classroom.



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Some schools have begun banning or limiting fidget spinners, saying that they have become a classroom distraction.

According to the SpinnerList, a database for fidget spinners and makers, **32 percent of the largest high schools in the United States have banned the toys or plan to ban the toy** by the end of the week.

Bellevue Independent Schools in Kentucky ask that **students bring in a doctor's note** in order to bring their spinners to school. And some schools like Fairview Park Elementary in Spencer, Iowa, **only allow students to use school-provided spinners**, reported by Now Cleveland.

Advocates point to research backing the claim of **"fidget therapy."** Research shows that when students are under-stimulated, they become restless and **may act out as they feel to need to increase stimulation** and physical comfort levels, affecting their ability to focus in the classroom.

The same study found that during academic tasks requiring concentration, **students with ADHD engaged in fine motor activities** like hair twirling, nail biting, and chewing on objects to generate and regulate stimulation in order to focus.

"There are lots of adaptive learning tools; just like some kids need glasses, others need fidgets," Melissa Feery, a special education teacher at Gainaird Elementary School in Mount Pleasant, Mich., told the **Washington Post**.

Joe Weaver, a K-6 physical education teacher at Balls Creek Elementary in Newton, N.C., uploaded a video on Twitter of his students using the spinners during interval warmup.



Diane Stile, a 6th grade math and science teacher at Jericho Middle School in New York, has used the toy's popularity as the inspiration for STEM projects in her classroom. Stile shared on Twitter pictures of her students creating their own spinners using cardboard, playdough, and pennies.



But other teachers used the topic to start classroom discussions on the cons of fidget spinners.



One of Berlin's student's, Jessie Welbeck, made the claim that fidget spinners, especially ones that light up or make noises, were "distracting because other people keep playing with them and it takes other students' attention."

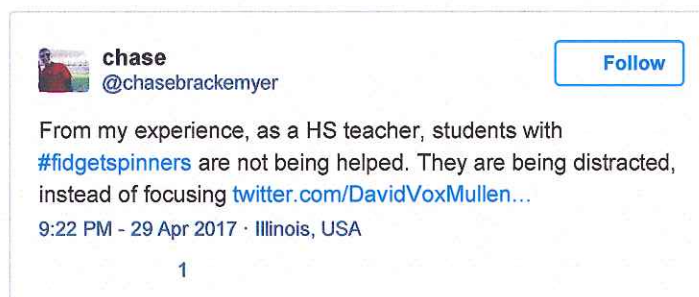
Another student of Berlin's was quick to point out that the toy becomes a distraction when students use it at inappropriate times in the classroom. Other students explained that when students are playing with the spinners, students and teachers both "lose focus."

"Just sitting and fidgeting with something is not going to really be that beneficial to a child with hyperactivity and inattention," Janine Artis, a mental health clinician in Williamsville, N.Y., told the Now Cleveland.

Cory Sicard, a 7th grade science teacher at Sierra Middle School in Parker, Colo., says the popularity of the spinners has caused a spike in theft among students, thus leading him and others teachers to ban spinners from their classrooms.

"Now that kids can't pull them out in class, there's less incentive for others to steal them," Sicard told the Washington Post. "Out of sight, out of mind, which is how most of the kids feel toward them now."

Many teachers have shared how often they have had to confiscate the toys with the increasing number of schools banning them from the classroom:



But **outright bans concern some experts**. Claire Heffron, a pediatric occupational therapist in Cleveland, told the Atlanta Journal Constitution that the spinners "can be part of a successful strategy for managing fidgety behavior if they are introduced as a normal part of the classroom culture."

"Teachers should explain that fidgets are a learning tool, not a toy, so students understand the purpose they're serving," the AJC reported, based on **guidelines suggested by experts**.

But other experts like Elaine Taylor-Klaus, co-founder of ImpactADHD, a coaching service for parents of children who have ADHD, told **TIME**, "fidget spinners are giving fidgets a bad name."

Teachers, do you think fidget spinners should be allowed in the classroom? Have you seen them in your classroom? Share your experiences and thoughts.

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dflier

2:27 PM on May 12, 2017

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The current toy craze, spinners, create more problems than they solve. They have become a more of a distraction than any fidgeting could ever have been. I do not allow them.



mcdonald0707

4:01 PM on May 12, 2017

Score: 1

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I have yet to see ANY student with a "fidget" use it for its intended purpose. Instead, students gaze at the spinning object, as if in a trance (kind of like being zoned out watching TV). Then, ALL the students able to see that fidget spinner are also visually mesmerized. Complete distraction. As a teacher, I have been told that I HAVE to allow any student to use them in the classroom, yet no child has produced a doctor or psychiatrist note validating it. Yet one more obstacle for teachers to deal with while being held accountable for high-quality instruction. FAIL.



LanguageTeacher

4:24 PM on May 12, 2017

Score: 1

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No. No. and NO. Kids have them because they are cool, not because they help them. They do not help at all when students are supposed to be listening and following directions or interacting with their peers in discussion, which is 90% of my class. Kids also compete with each other, take them apart and drop them with regularity. They need to be banned.



LDMR2017

4:33 PM on May 12, 2017

Score: 0

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I think fidget spinners or other fidget items can be useful tools for those students who legitimately need them and it is part of their learning plan. I also feel that as teachers, we do need to look closely at our current students and seriously think about how we teach. Some traditional methods just aren't effective for today's students. One cannot teach the way one taught 20 years ago.



mcruiz

11:03 AM on May 13, 2017

Score: 0

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Fidget spinners are toys, and as such, a horrible distraction in the classroom. My school has banned them, and we are quite grateful and relieved, since they were getting out of hand.

The argument that the spinners "can be part of a successful strategy for managing fidgety behavior if they are introduced as a normal part of the classroom culture," is typical of advocates or enablers without classroom experience. How are we ever going to manage fidgety behavior, if we allow students to play with fidgets every time they want?





ANardi

Score: 0

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11:49 AM on May 13, 2017

My observations are that students are using them more as a status symbol ("I've got the latest new craze, look how cool I am") instead of a tool to increase focus. Theft issues have been ridiculous. Our school has banned them. I have had to spend my time confiscating and calling parents because of them. No thank you.



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