

Dear Counselling Corner:

My child really needs to fidget as a way to deal with stress. I know that there are a lot of fidget toys out there and some are great but others are not that educational. Do you have any suggestions for 'busy hand activities' for my child which may be productive?

Thankful Mom

Dear Mom

There are many benefits associated with getting your child to do something busy with their hands which can help all children, and not just the anxious child. Here are some websites which I found:

<https://www.mylifeasarinagade.com/2017/01/15-activities-to-keep-kids-hand-busy-during-read-aloud-time/>

<https://www.buzzfeed.com/rebekahshoemake/things-to-help-fidgety-people-stay-focused>

<https://lemonlimeadventures.com/sensory-hacks-focus-fidgety-child/>

And what about using play dough or clay? This can work well for your preschool, elementary and older children. A wonderful colleague of mine gave each of her students a ball of play dough which she had made and a paper plate and had them CREATE! An extraordinary sense of calmness enveloped the class, and nobody spoke at first. And then they began to exclaim:

- Wow! I have not played with play dough since preschool! And this is so fun! I forgot what this was like!
- I love the way the play dough feels! How come we don't do this more often?
- I never knew I could be so creative. This is cool!
- I want to do this again!

The creations which began to evolve, blew my mind. I decided to grab a ball of clay for myself and began working it with my fingers. I was immediately a child again, drawn to a relaxed and carefree world. My mind began to come alive, and I began to dream of things I could make. Later, I researched to remind myself the benefits of using play dough and clay. This is what I found. Playing with play dough and clay can:

- Improve hand-eye coordination skills. Hand-eye coordination is a neurological process where the visual input provided by the eye is used to guide the hands in performing a task.
- Reduce stress
- Encourage trial and error and helps students to recognize that it is alright to make a mistake.
- Develop fine motor skills which will help them to be successful in many other ways
- Teach creativity
- Encourage play-based learning
- Improve a child's patience and perseverance
- Improve abstract and logical thinking
- Support self-regulation

- Improve memory
- Build on a child's self-confidence, responsibility and curiosity
- AND is very low cost to make and a lot of fun!

I found some great websites which describe the benefits of playing with clay and play dough in more detail.

<https://www.kokuyocamlin.com/blog/benefits-of-playing-with-clay-for-kids.html>

<https://bb.ca/en/articles/article/educational-benefits-of-playing-with-modelling-clay-or-pottery-clay/51/>

It is very inexpensive to make play dough and here is the recipe:

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 3/4 cup salt
- 2 cups lukewarm water
- 2 tablespoons of vegetable oil (coconut oil works too)
- food coloring (optional)
- 4 teaspoons cream of tartar (optional)

Mix this together and let your child play. Perhaps like me, you will want to play as well and so join in on the fun 😊. Store the clay in a closed zip lock bag in the fridge to make it last longer.

The Counselling Corner is intended to offer some helpful ideas, encouragement and insight on a variety of topics to support your child's social and emotional learning. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns at hchang@sd43.bc.ca.

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