


# Everyone Stims: When To Re- Direct

## Evaluating Self-Stimulatory Behaviors

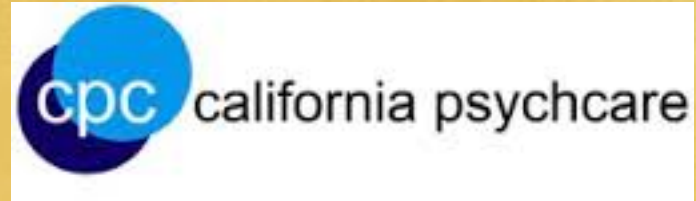
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California Psychcare



# Topics to Cover

- Self-Stimulatory Behavior: What is it?
  - Why does it happen?
  - Everyone stims! A look deeper into the behavior.
  - What should you do?
  - Respect before you re-direct
  - Questions?
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# My Background



- Board Certified Behavior Analyst
- Masters in Applied Behavior Analysis
- Certification in Autism
- 10 years in the field working with early childhood education, children, and young adults.
- Experience in schools, homes, and therapy centers.
- Currently the director for an in-home agency supporting children and adults with special needs.



# What is “stimming”?

- Stimming is another word for self-stimulatory behaviors. (SSB)
- SSB: any repetitive body movement with or without objects
- An SSB occurs as a form of stimulation to the body.



# Different Types of Stims

- Visual: staring out of the corners of one's eyes
- Auditory: repeating lines from a television show
- Tactile: rubbing fingers against the carpet
- Vestibular: spinning
- Taste: licking objects
- Smell: sniffing others



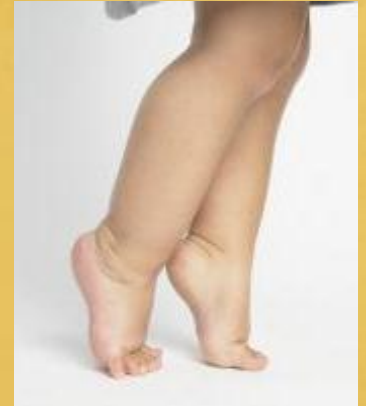
# “Typical” Stims



- Twirling your hair
- Tapping your foot
- Humming
- Whistling
- Biting your nails
- Tapping your pencil
- Cracking your knuckles

# “Atypical” Stims

- Hand flapping
- Jumping repeatedly
- Unusual vocalizations (EeeeEEeEee)
- Chewing on non-edible items
- Smelling stranger’s hair
- Covering your ears in busy stores
- Walking on your tip toes





# Why?

- What is the purpose of stimming?
- In Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), we always look at the function of a behavior.
- Stimming is seen as automatically reinforcing.
- This means the behavior occurs because it feels good to the person doing it.





# So Many Different Reasons...

## Medical

- The behavior helps to soothe a medical ailment.

i.e. The child is sensitive to noise. Humming and covering the ears helps to decrease the loud noises in the environment.

i.e. Chewing on items could be to soothe a toothache.

## Sensory

- The behavior provides sensory stimulation.

i.e. Rocking back and forth provides a positive sensation to the child.

i.e. Walking on tiptoes allows the child to feel unique sensations in the calves and legs.



# .... And the list goes on

## Escape

- The child engages in the behavior as a means to “tune out” the world around him/her.

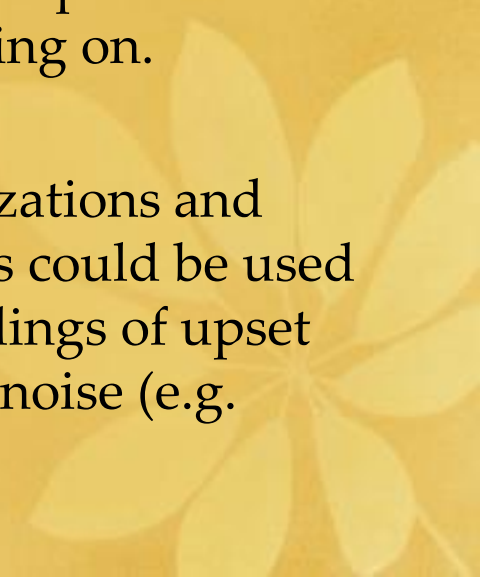
i.e. Repeating lines from a show serves as a means to ignore the vocalizations of others.

## Communication of Emotions

- The child uses the behavior as a means to communicate emotion

i.e. Jumping up and down or flapping hands in response to a favorite show coming on.

i.e. Unusual vocalizations and hands over the ears could be used to demonstrate feelings of upset due to an aversive noise (e.g. police siren).



# Everyone Stims!



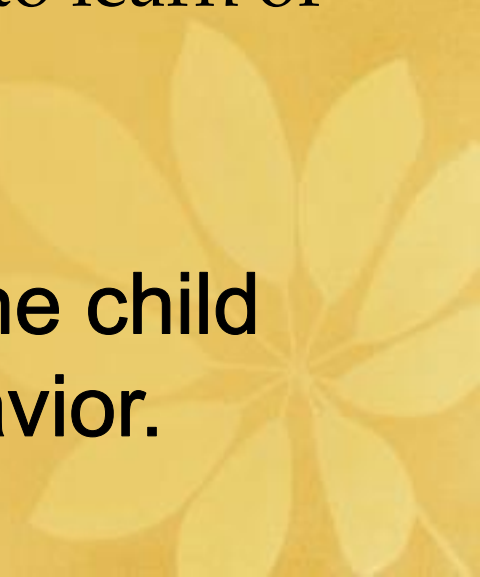




# Think about Why

- Your first reaction would be to tell the child to stop.
- Before reacting, first think...
  - Why is it happening?
  - Is it interfering with his/her ability to learn or interact?
  - Does he/she know what else to do?

**Stopping one stim may result in the child replacing it with a “worse” behavior.**

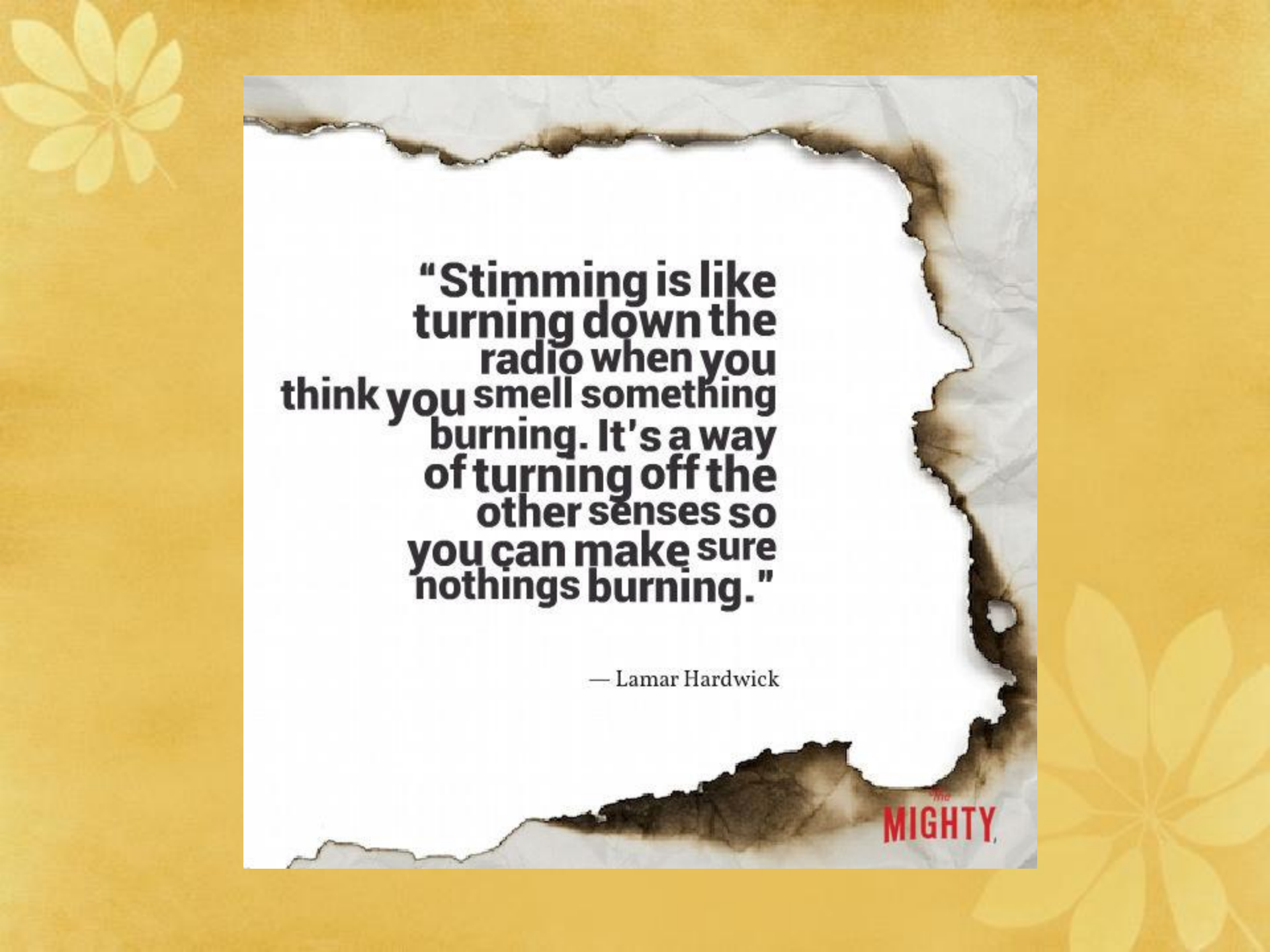




## Why do I stim? As stated from those with autism

Shared from source:

<https://themighty.com/2016/01/what-stimming-feels-like-for-people-with-autism/>




**“Stimming is like turning down the radio when you think you smell something burning. It’s a way of turning off the other senses so you can make sure nothings burning.”**

— Lamar Hardwick

The  
**MIGHTY**





**"It's involuntary,  
so I don't always  
realize I'm bouncing  
my leg. It bothers  
some people,  
but I can't help  
it."**

— Sydney Brown

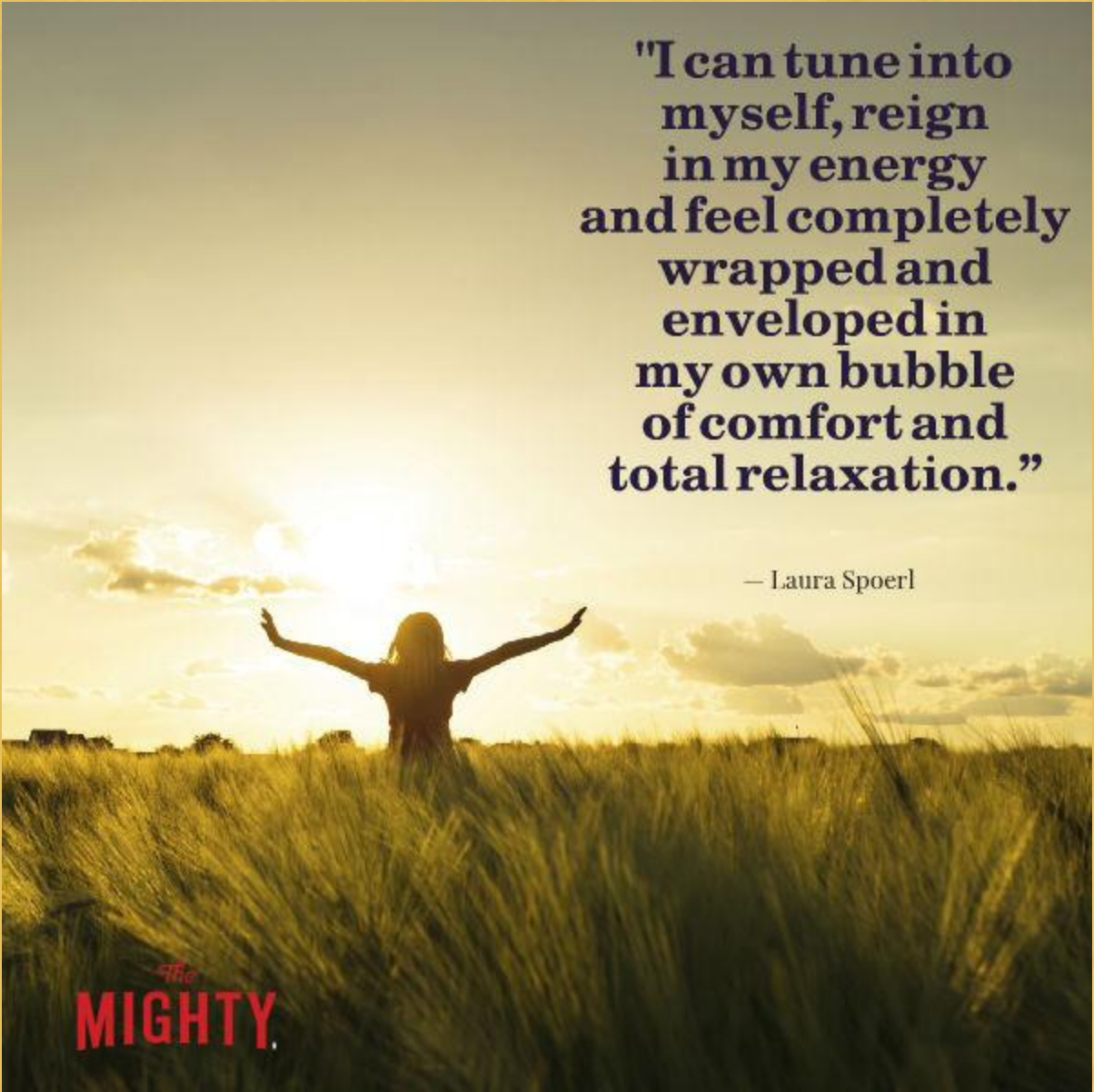
*The*  
**MIGHTY**

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a light pink top. She has her eyes closed and a pained expression, with her hands pressed against her temples. The background is a solid grey color.

**“Sometimes  
the sensory input  
gets too much,  
and I feel like  
I might explode.  
Stimming releases  
the tension.”**

— Lucy Clapham

*The*  
**MIGHTY**



**"I can tune into  
myself, reign  
in my energy  
and feel completely  
wrapped and  
enveloped in  
my own bubble  
of comfort and  
total relaxation."**


— Laura Spoerl

*The*  
**MIGHTY**






# Points to Consider

- Remember, stimming occurs for a reason.
  - Requesting the child to stop will result in the child needing an alternative means to fulfill the sensory need.
  - Instead of stopping the behavior, think of a behavior that is more socially acceptable.
  - Let's look at some examples....
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# Repeating Lines from a Show

- Stim: Repeating lines from Thomas the Tank Engine ('scripting')
  - Replacement Options:
    - Engage in a conversation with the child pertaining to Thomas.
    - Script with the child.
    - Ask the child questions about the show.
- 

## Behavior

Vocal  
Stereotypy

## What it looks like

Repeating  
words/phrases

High-Pitch  
Squeals

Irregular  
speaking pitch

## Alternative Behaviors

Singing

Talking with  
someone

Listening to  
music/movies





# Spinning in Circles



- Stim: Spinning in circles
- Replacement Options:
  - Turn on music and dance together.
  - Play Ring Around the Rosy.
  - Sit in an office chair, and spin the child.
  - Go swing.
  - Complete other exercises such as running, jumping on a trampoline, and riding bikes.

# Smelling Others

- Stim: Smelling other's hair, arms, etc...
- Replacement Options:
  - Utilize scented lotions or oils for the child to smell.
  - Create “smell jars” (jars with cotton balls spritzed with various scents)
  - Teach child appropriate greetings as a means to interact with others.



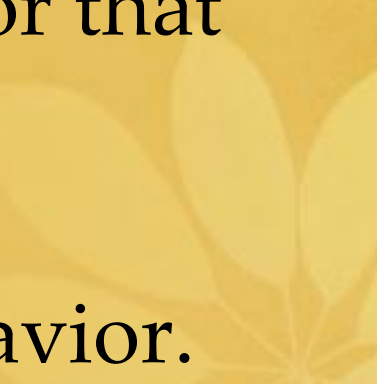


# Stimming as a Coping Method

- Many children I have worked with use various stims (such as cuddling animals, fidgets, bouncing in the chair) to help them focus.
- Although this seems counter intuitive, evaluate if the child is able to attend while doing the stimulatory behavior.
- Are they still answering questions?
- Are they looking at the instructor/materials?
- Don't focus on eye contact. Eye contact does not always equate to attending.

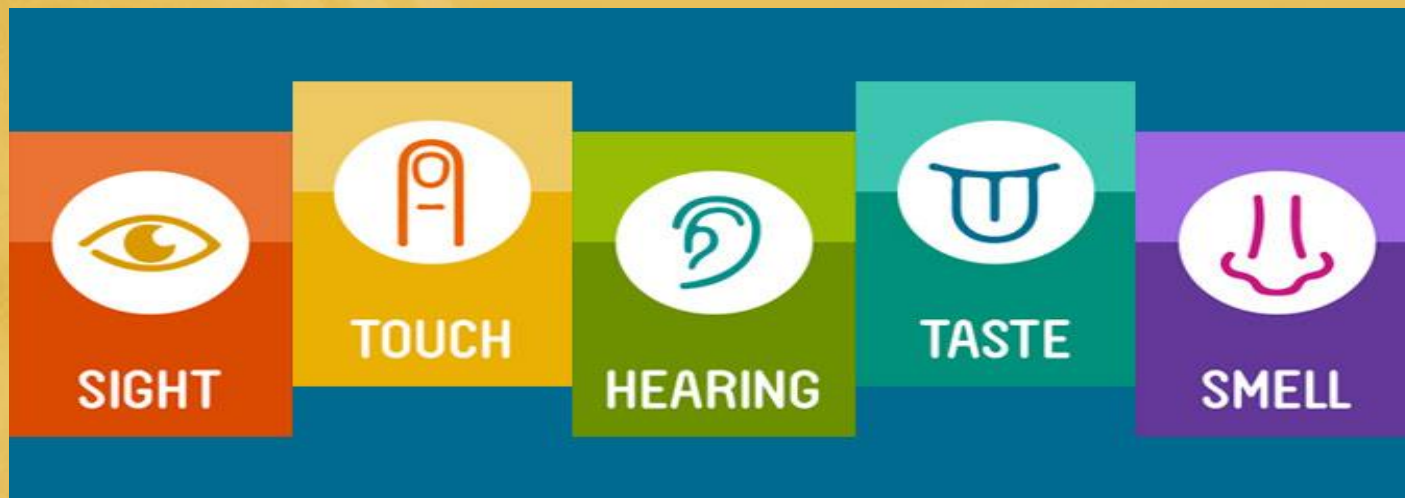


# General Strategies for Redirection

- If you cannot answer the question, “Why,” here are a few things you can try.
  - Respect the behavior.
  - Engage in the behavior with the child.
  - Try engaging in a similar behavior that would not be deemed as socially unacceptable.
  - Re-direct to an incompatible behavior.
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# Incompatible Behaviors

- Think about the stim. What part of the body does it involve?
- Engage the child in an alternative activity that involves the same body part(s).







# Unengaged and Bored



- Teach the child a more appropriate manner in which to interact.
- Stims may occur because the child simply does not know what else to do; they are bored and unengaged.



# Ideas on Incompatible Behaviors

- Child is licking items. Incompatible behavior- eating a snack. Chewing gum. Talking. You can't lick items while doing those other behaviors.
  - TipToe Walking. Incompatible behaviors: running, jumping, riding a bike, sitting down. You cannot tip toe AND ride a bike.
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# More Ideas

- Rocking back and forth. Incompatible behaviors- sitting in a chair, laying on the floor and coloring, jumping on a trampoline.




- Staring out the corners of eyes.  
Incompatible behavior- using a light up toy and tracking. Playing flash light tag.





# Structure Your Days

- Children (and adults!) stim when they are bored. Think about your behavior in a business meeting....
  - One way to help prevent this is through the use of structure.
  - Visual Schedules.
  - Organized play activities.
  - Multitude of toys in various sensory types.
  - Independent Activity Schedule (IAS)
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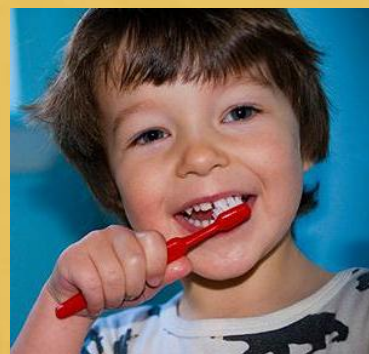
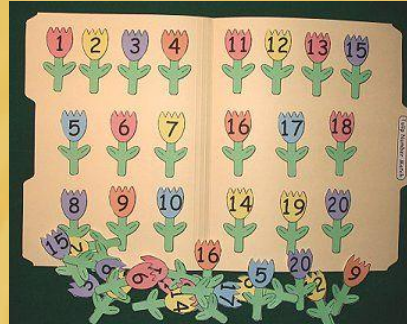
# Independent Activity Schedule

- One common misconception is that you must engage with your child 24/7. We all know that is physically impossible!
- Find activities that have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Activities should be relatively easy and enjoyable.
- Take pictures of each activity, and place pictures on a velcro schedule.
- Direct the child to “do your schedule”.
- Reinforce the child to complete each component in the schedule without your assistance.
- Now when you need to cook dinner, you can direct the child to his/her IAS!





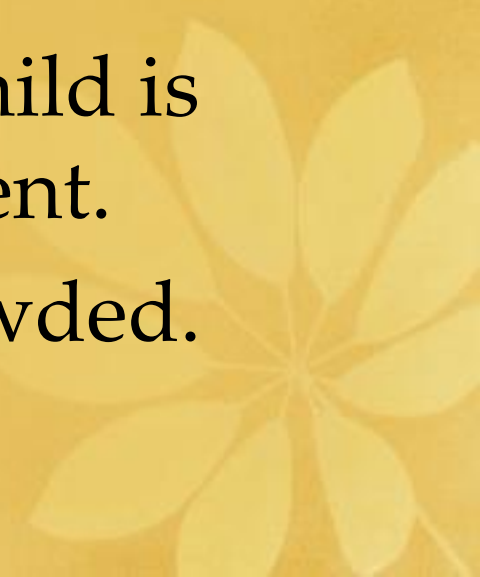
# Activity Ideas



- Pegboard
- Puzzle
- Lacing Cards
- File Folder Games
- Chores: i.e. Clean room, make bed, put away toys
- Self help: wash hands, brush teeth, shower



# Cause: Overwhelmed

- On the flip side, a child may stim when feeling overwhelmed. Think of a job interview. You are more likely to fidget due to nerves.
  - Children feel the same way!
  - Stimming may occur when the child is overwhelmed with an environment.
  - Perhaps it is too noisy or too crowded.
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# Overwhelmed

- Look at the environment when your child is stimming.
- Be prepared!
- Noise sensitive: bring ear buds or headphones
- Crowd sensitive: plan trips to less crowded locations or on less crowded days. Create or find “quiet corners” for your child to calm down away from the chaos.



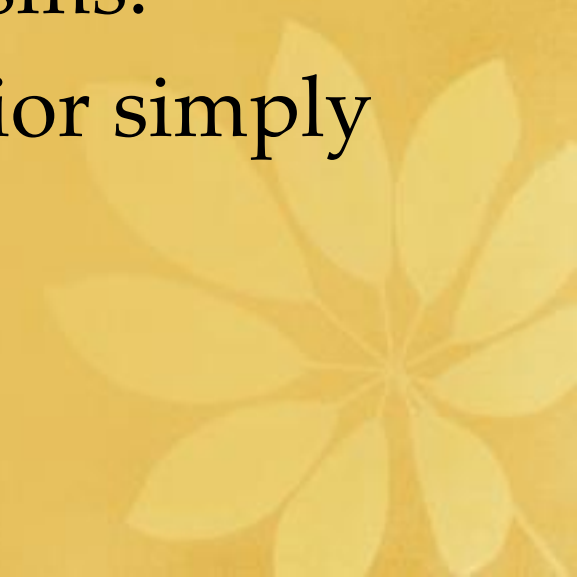


# Quiet and Calm Ideas





# Most Importantly

- Stimming is part of your personality.
  - Accept that your child has unique and special ways to interact and cope with the environment.
  - Respect these unique mannerisms.
  - Never try to change the behavior simply because it looks “weird”.
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# Autism



Seeing the World from a  
Different Angle





# Resources

- Contact me directly for inquiry as to services. [Csebastian@calpsychcare.com](mailto:Csebastian@calpsychcare.com)
  - Additional information regarding Self-Stimulatory behaviors:
    - <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2012/03/22/the-cause-of-stimming-whats-your-stim/>
    - <https://www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk/understanding-autism/behaviour/repetitive-behaviours-and-stimming>
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