

Introduction to Stimming

Stimming is a term used to describe self-stimulating behaviour. In other words, any actions done which will provide some physical, sensory or emotional input.

Stimming can take many forms but more common 'stims' include rocking, spinning, flapping or making repetitive sounds.

We know there are many reasons for stimming; most often it comes from a need for self-regulation or a way for someone to feel in control, but it can simply be because it feels good.

Some other examples of why people may stim include:

- **A means of emotional regulation:** Stimming is part of an autistic person's body language and the key to supporting someone regarding stimming is to accept this and encourage it where appropriate. It can be a powerful tool in helping to manage and control certain emotions. Stimming may be used as a coping mechanism for emotions such as anxiety but it's equally important to understand stimming as a way of expressing positive emotions too, for example, hand flapping, which can be a way of showing and experiencing excitement.
- **A means of sensory regulation:** Hyper or hyposensitivity can be another reason for an individual to stim. For example, if an individual is under stimulated in a sensory context, they may stim by rocking or spinning to get more sensory input. If an individual is hypersensitive to certain stimuli, they may use stimming as a way to focus on different sensations.
- **Social regulation:** Social situations such as attending a new group or starting a new school can be very uncomfortable for some people and stimming can help relieve this uncomfortable or overwhelming feeling and can help a person manage their interactions better.
- **It is fun:** More and more we are hearing from autistic people that stimming is also a huge source of fun.

NB - Some self-stimulating behaviours can be harmful for the individual doing them or others around them. This might include things like head banging, biting themselves or repeated hair pulling. Usually, it is not recommended to stop a person from stimming as this can also be harmful to their mental health and emotional wellbeing, however, it is important to separate manageable stimming from harmful stimming.

If an individual's stimming involves them hurting themselves, or others, you should try to find a distraction or replacement for this behaviour. We would always advise you seek professional advice in these instances.