

Guide to Stimming for Professionals

What is stimming?

Stimming is a shorter way of saying self-regulatory behaviour. This means behaviour which allows you to regulate or manage your emotions, or actions. These behaviours are normally repetitive.

Do only autistic people stim?

No! Neurotypical people sometimes stim, for example by twisting a ring or twisting their hands or fingers, when they are experiencing intense emotions. Stimming is also seen in other neurodivergent people such as ADHDers. However, autistic may need to stim more than non-autistic people as environments are often less inclusive for autistic people, meaning they are more likely to need to self-regulate or self-soothe.

What are common stims?

It is difficult to say that there is a 'common' stim because there is so much variety. However, stimming may include:

- Flapping your arms
- Biting fingernails
- Tapping fingers
- Rocking back and forth
- Clapping
- Sucking thumb
- Repeating words or noises

Why do people stim?

People stim for many reasons. Someone might stim if they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed however someone might also stim if they are excited or happy.

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Should I try to stop people from stimming?

No! If people are stimming to self-regulate, they need to do this. There is nothing wrong with stimming, and people who think there are incorrect. However, if an individual's stimming behaviours are causing danger to themselves or others, you might want to discuss alternative stims with the individual

Examples of dangerous stimming behaviours include:

- Placing dangerous items in mouth
- Headbutting a wall or other objects
- Scratching skin/pulling at scabs
- Biting

However, many autistic people feel as if they need to hide their stimming behaviours due to other people being unsupportive. That is why it is really important that we create neuro-affirming spaces to protect the psychological safety of neurodivergent individuals.

How can organisational policies be supportive to stimming?

People should not be discriminated against (indirectly or directly) for stimming. Discriminating against someone for stimming breaks the Equality Act and therefore is illegal.

Examples of organisational policies which would discriminate against someone for stimming may include:

- Policies in schools or colleges where individuals are punished for having something in their hands when the teacher is speaking
- Policies in schools or colleges when someone is punished for speaking when the behaviour is a stim
- Policies in the workplace which punish individuals for doodling or using sensory aids during meetings
- Not punishing individuals who make judgemental comments about stimming e.g. describing a fellow employee or student as 'babyish' for using a sensory aid
- Policies in which individuals are made to do administrative duties rather than customer facing roles as their stimming is deemed 'unprofessional'.

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