What is EF?

Landmark College says Executive Function (EF) is defined as "The cognitive processes that regulate an individual's ability to sustain self-directed behavior toward a goal."

The disorders that are characterized by EF deficit include ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder) and ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder.)

EF is a finite resource that maintains our attention, planning, emotion and sustaining attention and effort.

The "EF bank" can change in size depending on the inner and outer environment. For example, a child may be tired or have a disability that affects the "EF bank."

Fidgets can help to expand the "EF bank" by increasing focus and attention.

A Good or Bad fidget?

A fidget is a toy or item that a person can manipulate in order to focus during a lecture or other attention-demanding activity.

Due to children sometimes using a fidget incorrectly, many teachers are reluctant to incorporate them in the classroom.

Fidget spinners, while popular, were made of metal and plastic. They also had a tendency to fly around the room. Attaching a fidget to a lanyard, necklace or keychain may prove helpful.

Ideally, the fidget should be soft and should be about the size of a fist or smaller, so as to stimulate the whole hand. In previous experiences, **stress balls** and **knotted string** were very helpful to maintain a child's sustained attention.

Helpful Accommodations for EF Deficit

- Allow the child to draw, color or use a fidget in class and let them take frequent breaks to allow them to process information.

- Give the child options as to what works best, if they get too distracted, try something else.

- Time and a half for all assignments, so that the child can put their best work forward.

- Allow the use of a tape recorder to help when a child cannot take notes and needs to fidget instead.

- Use of a four function calculator during Math.

Why Fidget?

Severely limiting a child with disabilities from movement could be counterproductive.

Dr. Mark Rapport, a famous researcher said that ADHD kids move to maintain alertness. (Teaching Teens…, pg. 59)

John Ratey, M.D. conducted research that showed **even a small amount of fidgeting increases dopamine and norepinephrine in the brain.**

Norapinephrine is a key transmitter that aids in focus and attention. Dopamine is primarily to regulate mood.

But how do we keep children moving without distracting the rest of the class? **Fidgets can help with maintaining constant mood and attention.**

Sources:

- *Teaching Teens with ADD, ADHD & Executive Function Deficits* by Chris A. Zeigler Dendy, M.S.
- *Fidget to Focus* by Roland Rotz, Ph.D. and Sarah D. Wright, M.S., A.C.T.
- *Academic Strategies and Executive Function Supports for Students with LD, ASD, ASD (MPDL 633X), a.k.a ASEF* from Landmark College

Website Article Links:

- https://www.additudemag.com/focus-factors/
- https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/common-classroom-accommodations-and-modifications
- https://www.livestrong.com/article/17497-dopamine-norepinephrine/

To Fidget Or Not to Fidget?

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