

## How to Stop Flapping and Other Self-Stimulatory Behaviors Worksheet By:

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Self-stimulatory behaviors (also called “stimming”) are things your child does to get extra sensory input when he needs it, such as hand flapping, rocking, biting himself, head-banging, or scratching himself. This guide will tell you why it happens and how to help your child stop flapping and engaging in those other self-stimulatory behaviors.

### What Causes Flapping and Self-Stimulatory Behaviors?

Self-stimulatory behaviors are common in children with autism as well as those with sensory-processing disorders. However, typically-developing children sometimes do these things as well. ***Just because your child is flapping or doing other self-stimulatory behaviors, it doesn't mean he has autism.*** Many people see a child rocking or flapping and they think, “Oh, that child has autism.” That’s not always the case! These behaviors are caused by unmet sensory needs and can be found in all different types of children, even those without disorders. In fact, adults often engage in self-stimulatory behaviors. We have just found socially acceptable ways of doing them so that no one thinks we’re crazy. For example, when I have to sit in a long meeting, my foot starts shaking, I doodle on my paper, I take out a piece of gum to chew, or I stand up and take a trip to the bathroom to get some movement in. All of these things are because I have been sitting without much sensory input for too long and my body is asking to move. If you saw me at a meeting, you wouldn’t think anything of it because we all do little things like that. However, children don’t know how to get those needs met in socially acceptable ways so they tend to engage in self-stimulatory behaviors that are less common in adults, such as hand flapping, rocking, etc. These behaviors tell us that the child is not getting the appropriate sensory input that he needs at that time. It could be that he just needs to get up and move. Or, it could mean that his sensory processing mechanisms are confused and aren’t receiving signals the way they should be. If your child shows a lot of self-stimulatory behaviors, you may want to look into finding help for your child’s sensory processing needs. There are clinics that are devoted just to helping children with sensory processing. However, you can help your child stop flapping and other self-stimulatory behaviors many times by simply finding other ways to get those sensory needs met.

### Why Would I Work With My Child to Stop Flapping and Self-Stimulatory Behaviors?

There are many reasons that you may want to help your child stop flapping or engaging in those other self-stimulatory behaviors. Some of them may be causing him physical harm, such as biting or scratching himself. Other things may call undue attention to your child which can cause him to have trouble making friends or engaging in social interactions. Other behaviors may begin to interfere with his education, for example if he is rocking or flapping so hard that he can’t focus on the teacher. Self-stimulatory behaviors by themselves are not necessarily a bad thing, but the side effects caused by them can be difficult for a child to cope with.

## How to Stop Flapping and Other Self-Stimulatory Behaviors:

You can help your child diminish his reliance on flapping and self-stimulatory behaviors by teaching him replacement behaviors that are less harmful, less distracting, and less noticeable to other people. Follow these steps to find out how:

### Step 1: Identify the Behavior and the Unmet Sensory Need:

This part can take some practice so have patience and contact someone who has experience with sensory processing or special education if you need help. The first thing you must do is identify what the behavior is and what sensory need it is meeting. For example, you may identify the behavior as flapping, rocking, biting, etc. Then, write down all of the times that you notice that behavior happen for a while. Make note of what your child was doing before, during, and after the behavior. You may notice that your child always starts doing the behavior when he's been sitting for too long, when he's tired, or when he's excited. Also, make note of what sensory input your child is probably getting from that behavior. For example, if your child is flapping his hands, he is probably getting sensory input in his fingers. If he is rocking, he is probably receiving sensory input about balance and where his body is in space. Take some notes that will help you come up with some ideas of other behaviors you can try to replace it with.

Write the unwanted behavior here: \_\_\_\_\_

What sensory input does your child seem to be getting from this? \_\_\_\_\_

Take note below of the times your child does this behavior including what's happening around that time:

Day/Time	What happened before?	What happened during?	What happened after?

Note any patterns that you saw here: \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 2: Try Replacement Behaviors that Meet the Same Need:

What you will want to do now is try some other behaviors that will replace the self-stimulatory behavior but that are safer or less distracting. Keep in mind that your child's new behavior may not look entirely normal either, but we are going for *more* safe or *less* distracting. Once your child gets used to the new behavior, you can always try to teach him an even more normal-looking behavior later. You will want to try several different replacement behaviors to find what works best for your child. Keep trying them until one seems to stick or resonate with your child. Use this chart to determine which replacement behaviors might be appropriate to try with your child based on the information you collected during the last step. Circle the ones you will try or write your own.

Possible Cause/Type of Self-Stimulatory Behavior	Possible Replacement Behaviors
Child Has Been Sitting Too Long	Have child request a movement break
	Offer alternative seating for the child, such as a chair vs. floor, sitting on a pillow, sitting on a small exercise ball, etc.
	Offer child a fidget toy to play with while sitting (something small and non-distracting that can keep his hands busy)
Child is Tired	Offer child a short nap (if possible)
Child is Excited	Replace with clapping hands
	Replace with squeezing hands together
Child is Angry/Upset	Replace with squeezing/biting/hitting a pillow
	Have child request break/go for a walk
	Do <a href="#">Self-Calming Strategies</a>
Child is Flapping/Sensory Input in Fingers	Replace with squeezing hands or pushing hands together
	Offer child a stress ball or squeezable toy to play with
	Replace with child sitting on hands (to feel that pressure)
Child is Rocking/Sensory Input for Balance and Body	Have your child rock side to side instead of front to back. This looks more like swaying along to music than the traditional rocking. It's also easier to keep his eyes on the teacher this way.
	Offer child a big hug, squeeze him tightly

	all over his torso to get that pressure
	Have child wear a tight vest or shirt. They make <a href="#">special sensory shirts</a> that hug the torso with gentle pressure
	Have your child request a break to go roll on the floor. Or, roll him up in a blanket like a burrito. He may miss a few minutes of whatever you were doing, but it will be worth it if he can focus when he gets back.
Child is Biting Himself/Sensory Input to Mouth	Replace with giving your child something to chew on. They make <a href="#">special jewelry that is designed for children to chew on</a> , even big kids!
	Offer your child a bite to eat or a piece of gum.
	Offer your child a chewy, sour candy. This can alert the senses in the mouth.
Child is Biting His Arm/Sensory Input to Arm	If your child doesn't respond to the mouth techniques, maybe he needs the sensory input in his arm. Try teaching him to squeeze his arm in that place or you can do it for him.
Child is Scratching Himself/Needs Deep Pressure Sensory Input	Try offering your child some deep pressure when he does this. That means, tight squeezes all over his body. You can also have him lay down and roll a big ball over his body. I've even lightly squished a child between two bean bags. Your child will tell you with his actions if he likes it or not. Don't keep trying something he's not comfortable with, but one of them may work.

Or, write your own strategies to try here: \_\_\_\_\_

Try these techniques and any others that you can think of that might get that same need met. Keep trying until you find one (or a few) that your child seems to respond to well. You may have to help your child do these things or do them for him for now.

### Step 3: Teach Your Child How to Use the Technique(s):

If your child is able to do some of these strategies on his own, keep showing him how to do it and then let him try by himself. Keep practicing until he can do it with just a verbal reminder. Then, every time he starts doing the prior self-stimulatory behavior, remind him to use the new strategy. If it is a strategy that your child cannot do alone, teach him how to ask for the strategy to be done for him. For example, if the strategy is to go take a movement break where he gets rolled up like a burrito, have him verbally ask for a break. Or, have him go find a “break card” (I use a red square with an X on it) and hand it to you. You can place these strategically in places he may need it. If your child is not able to request these techniques at this time, that’s ok. Just keep doing them for him but keep talking to your child about what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. He may start to pick that up on his own and eventually ask for it.

Write the plan here so you can share it with other adults in the child’s life:

When the child does this behavior: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Encourage him to use this behavior instead: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Use these prompts or cues to help him remember: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Keep working on this until it becomes consistent. Then, you can go back and use this worksheet again to work on a different behavior. Thanks for reading! Don’t forget to [go to the blog post](#) and click the social media share buttons so others can benefit from this information as well!