

# • Why They Can't Sit Still ... and Ways to Help •



Children with attentional difficulties often have a tendency toward two major problems when it comes to staying seated in class: 1) **Lack of focus** and 2) the **inability** to sit or stand for a long period of time. Their brain tends to "under register" movement, and without that ability, they can't focus. Their brains are telling their bodies to get up and move to help them listen and attend BETTER! They actually can't help getting up and squirming! Their brains are telling their bodies to do this to help them learn better! Although they look strong in quick actions, the body can't endure long periods of sitting or standing.

Successful strategies include allowing as much movement as possible without disrupting others while sitting. When other organizing strategies are used, along with a new seating option, many children can double or triple previous sitting time periods. These modifications include:

- 1) Allowing small movement opportunities with the hands using fidgets (Koosh balls, stress balls etc.) or with the mouth, using gum or "chewys"
- 2) Move and Sit seat cushions & wedges or therapy ball chairs
- 3) Try placing a piece of theraband around the child's desk or chair legs to kick/bounce and allow movement in the legs without having to get up all the time
- 4) Ensure the student's desk contains only the essentials. Encourage the student to place books, pencils, erasers and general supplies in the same spot after each lesson. Make sure the student's desk is free of clutter and visual distractions
- 5) Be clear about when student movement is permitted and when it is discouraged, such as during independent work times. It is important to explain to the child that fidgets and cushions are *learning tools* (if they are disrespected, they should be temporarily taken away)

The second major strategy is to provide as much support as possible while sitting so the body feels secure. This includes: Feet flat on the floor or footrest, Good back support (No bucket-shaped plastic chairs!), and hips and knees at 90-degree angles. The elbows should rest comfortably on the table without having to raise or droop the shoulders. Most classrooms have terrible seating arrangements and poor heights of student to tables!

For children with attentional difficulties, printing neatly can often be a challenge. When it is important that handwriting be well organized and legible, provide increased time, clear expectations ("I expect this work to be very well done in your *best handwriting*") and a distraction free environment (quiet, clutter free). Provide accommodations for decreased legibility during group work, brainstorming or higher stress times (ex. tests).

Finally, encourage lots of physical activity during recess, gym and after school time.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact your Occupational Therapist,