

Fidget toys can help in classrooms, but they can also be a big distraction

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Employees help people shopping for spinner fidget toys on April 27, 2017, at Learning Express in Clarendon Hills, Illinois. Photo from Chicago Tribune/TNS

CHICAGO, Illinois — They come in bright colors. They spin in your hand with the push of a button. The toy of the moment is a fidget. Students like spinning them during recess. But, they spin them during class time, too.

Experts say spinning a fidget helps some students. Many students struggle with ADHD. A student with ADHD cannot sit still at their desk. It is hard for them to focus on what the teacher is saying. Using a fidget during class can actually help students with ADHD. They may be able to listen better.

Not everyone likes students using fidget toys in class, though. Some teachers are bothered by the spinning. They think students using fidgets are not paying attention. As a result, some schools are banning the toy.

Washington Elementary in Illinois is one of those schools. Kate Ellison is the principal. She says the toys were distracting students.

The Most Popular Toy In School

"Kids are trading them or spinning them instead of writing," said Ellison.

The fidgets became more and more popular. It was becoming a problem in class.

Ellison sent a letter to parents about the fidget ban.

If students need therapy tools, Ellison says the school has those. Underneath desks are rubber bands, a ball or velcro to play with. These are supposed to help students stay focused in class. Ellison says they are less distracting than the fidgets.

A Number Of Schools Have Banned Them

Washington Elementary is not the only school to ban fidgets. Reports of other schools banning fidgets are in the news. Some schools make exceptions for some students. They allow students with special needs to use them.

Janelle Feylo is a parent in Illinois. She approves of the ban at her son's school. Her son is in fourth grade. Feylo says he started asking her about fidgets. He even came home with a homemade fidget. Feylo later took it away.

"I don't think he needs it," she said. "I don't want him to get in trouble."

Fidget Therapy Does Work

Kristie Koenig is an expert on occupational therapy. This kind of therapy helps students with special needs. Occupational therapy helps them do better in class. Koenig thinks fidget therapy works. She says banning fidgets is not a good idea.

Fidget tools can help anyone, says Koenig. They are not just for students with special needs. Still, she warns against using them as a toy.

"We don't want kids to use them as toys to distract," she said.