



ART BRIDGES: Lesson Plans for Enrichment, Growth and Healing

Relaxation Tools Library

A Copyrighted Activity Created by and Re-posted with Permission from

Kristina Marcelli Sargent

<https://kristinamarcelli.wordpress.com>

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“Rain Sticks”

Objectives:

The participants will:

1. Identify and use “aids” that help them focus and calm themselves
2. Learn how to create their own calming devices

Audience:

This article/activity was designed for children but adults could also benefit from creating and using some of the “fidgets” and calming devices described in this article.

Note: *Kristina is a school-based therapist who understands that kids can benefit from calming devices such as “stress balls” and “glitter bottles”. She also realizes*

that kids don't always remember to take these "aids" with them when they need them the most. As a result, she keeps her own supply basket of glitter bottles, bendable toys, stress balls and "fidgets" to help kids focus.

About Fidgets and Calming Devices:

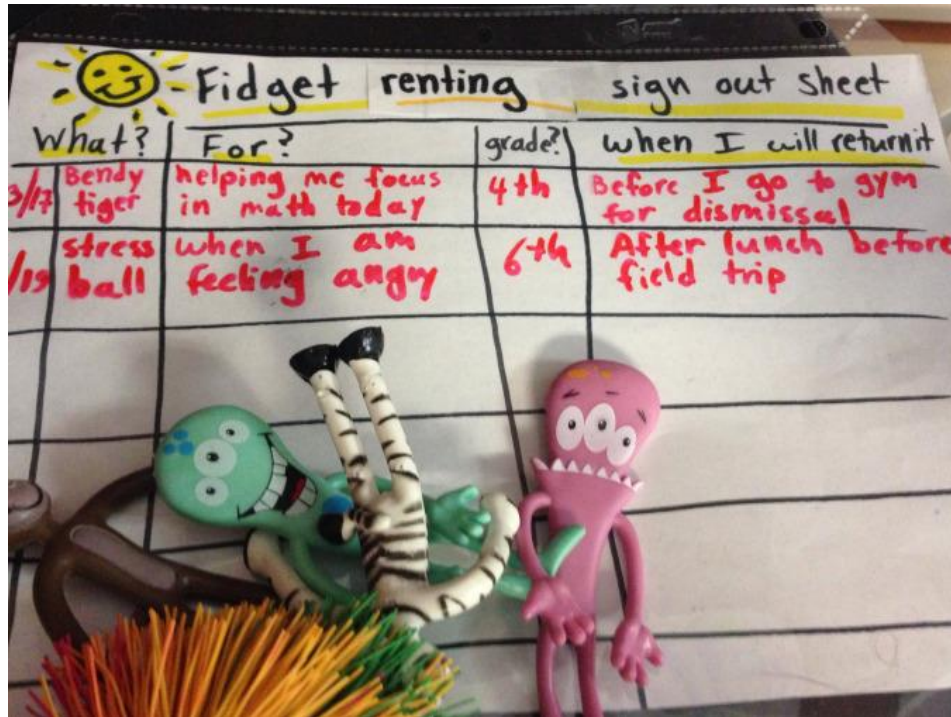
1. Fidget toys are self-regulation tools to help with focus, attention, calming and active listening and come in all different, shapes, sizes and textures.
2. They are helpful for the restless adult and child alike but are also useful for those with learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and even autism to help increase focusing and reduce fidgeting.
3. The old adage, "Busy the hands to calm the mind" comes into play. So although they may look like toys, fidgets are actually valuable tools for everyone to use to calm and focus.

Relaxation Tools Library

In order to help children have the calming/focusing tools they need but still teach them responsibility, Kristina has developed her own "Relaxation Tools Library" for her clients' use. Following is her description of the process:

1. I made a sign-out sheet for students to "rent" the fidgets for the day.
2. I put the paper inside of a sheet protector so dry erase markers can be used and paper can be saved. The sheet includes the date, a description of the fidget being borrowed, the purpose (helping remind them of when and how to use the skill), when it is going to be returned, and the child's grade instead of name or initials (for confidentiality purposes and this is usually enough to jog my memory of who has what).

"I find that the sheet helps increase accountability and responsibility and kids love being praised for returning the fidgets. If a child loses the item, we review what happened, how they could have taken better care of it and decide on a length of time when the child can try again, if appropriate. I think this sign-out system is also helpful because it allows an opportunity for children to feel that someone trusts them, which so many of the children we work with have never felt before."



Additional Resources:

How to Make Your Own “Calming Glitter Bottle”

Supplies/Materials:

- Any container with a lid (mason jars, bottles, etc.) suitable for your participants (Plastic water bottles are suggested for kids but just about anything will work.)
- A funnel if the mouth of your container is small
- Glitter glue to give the liquid viscosity (*note: if you don't have glitter glue, you can use clear school glue and extra glitter*)
- Chunky and fine glitter to add variety
- Water
- Food coloring (optional)
- Super Glue

Instructions:

- 1) Put 1 cup of hot water into your container.

- 2) Add two tablespoons of glitter glue to the container.
- 3) Whisk the mixture to break up the glitter and glue.
- 4) Add the extra glitter to the container until there is about a ½ inch to ¾ inch layer at the bottom—the more glitter the better!
- 5) Optional: You can add food coloring if you'd like.
- 6) Fill up the container with water, leaving one inch at the top to allow some shaking room.
- 7) Super glue the lid into place

Kristina's Instructions for Using the Glitter Bottle— "Cloudy Mind Vs. Clear Mind"

Step One: Shake up the glitter bottle. Notice how you can no longer see the water in the bottle. This is what your brain looks like when feeling intense emotions such as anger, sadness or fear. When your brain becomes full of angry, sad or fearful thoughts that makes us feel even worse! When our brains are full of these thoughts we cannot think clearly and may make bad choices.

Step Two: Take three deep breaths. Do this while you are watching the glitter settle to the bottom of the bottle. Focus your mind on your breathing. The glitter is like all of your upsetting thoughts going away, clearing your mind.

Step Three: Notice now that all the glitter has settled—the water is clear again. This is just like your brain being cleared from the upsetting thoughts and calmed by taking deep breaths. Now you can think more clearly and make good choices.

"I use this technique with children in therapy as a coping skill for anger and frustration as well as a relaxation skill for anxiety and sadness. I explain the bottle to parents and caregivers as a concrete visual for deep breathing. I explain to the children to shake up the bottle when experiencing the emotion (anxiety, anger, sadness) and the bottle can also be used for calming hyperactivity. I show the child how the glitter clouds the water and they cannot see through it, just as they cannot think clearly or make safe choices when overwhelmed by the emotion. The child then takes deep breaths while watching the glitter settle. When the water is calm and they can see through the water to the other side, they know their body is calmer too and they can think more clearly. It is fun to have children practice using

the bottle too. "Pretend you're really mad! Show me your angry face and body. Okay that looks very angry. Now shake up the bottle..." Etc.

Forewarning to parents and caregivers:

1. If the child (or person using the glitter bottle) is extremely escalated, a glitter bottle will more than likely become a projectile bottle.
2. It is best to attempt to engage children in de-escalation when first warning signs are noticed, not when the child is in full-blown tantrum mode.
3. Creating a calm-down area at home (area filled with soft pillows, blankets, feelings poster, etc.) is a great place to keep the bottle so children can learn to self-utilize the bottle for calming.
4. Again, practicing the routine will work wonders: "Pretend like you are very angry. Oh wow you look angry! Now show me where in the house you go when you are angry. Okay and show me what you do to calm down there." (Look at feelings poster, punch pillow, use bottle, etc.) "Wow! I really like how you are practicing how to calm down when you are angry and this is your special place in the house to do that!"

How To Make a "Stress Ball"

Note: Prior to the making the Stress Balls, make sure none of your participants have an allergy to Latex. These Stress Balls are also easier to make if two people work together.

Supplies/Materials:

- Round balloons (do not use water balloons as they are too thin)
- Cornstarch
- Funnel
- Permanent markers for decorating (optional)

Instructions:

1. Blow up the balloon until it is about 4-5 inches in diameter—do not tie it.
2. Pinch the top of the balloon shut an inch or 2 from the opening.
3. Place a funnel inside the opening of the balloon while pinching it shut and fill the balloon to the top with cornstarch.
4. Slowly release the top of the balloon so the cornstarch can work its way down in the balloon.

5. Keep adding cornstarch to the funnel until the balloon is filled to about three inches.
6. Take out the funnel and pinch out any excess air.
7. Tie the balloon closed trying not to leave any space between the knot and the cornstarch.
8. Squeeze away!

Note: There are a lot of benefits for using stress balls: squeezing the Ball can boost blood circulation, help with the treatment of carpal-tunnel syndrome, release tension and stress and be used as a meditation tool. Stress Balls can even be used for physical therapy to strengthen the muscles in the hand and wrist.

Rain Sticks

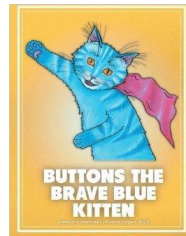
Rain sticks originated centuries ago in Chile where South American tribesmen would harvest dead branches from cactus plants, fill them with small pebbles and cap the ends, creating rain sticks. Children can create their own rain sticks and use them as an additional calming device, listening to the sound of “rain”, paying attention to the rhythm and re-focusing their emotions as they manipulate the rain stick. Visit Dick Blick site <http://www.dickblick.com/lesson-plans/rain-sticks/> to learn more about rain sticks and how to create them.



Note: You can also use the lesson plan “Chilean Rain Sticks” found on the Hildegard “Art Bridges” website.

*Heartfelt thanks to **Kristina Marcelli Sargent (MSW)** who graciously gave permission to Hildegard Center to re-post this activity from her website <https://kristinamarcelli.wordpress.com> . Kristina is a mental health therapist*

(living in Cincinnati, OH) who works with children and their families. Her blog is a place where creative expression and social/emotional well-being can become one, offering creative interventions, activities and inspiration for all ages—please visit it! Kristina has her undergraduate degree in art and creative writing and has written and illustrated her first book, “Buttons the Brave Blue Kitten” a story



about separation anxiety intended to help children develop empathy and give adults the skills to reinforce its development. The book is available to order on Kristina’s website or on Amazon.com. Also check out Kristina’s newest book: “Ursula Unwinds Her Anger” which teaches children mindfulness-related skills and offers adults tips on encouraging these skills in children. You can purchase this great book at <http://www.amazon.com/Ursula-Unwinds-Kristina-Marcelli-Sargent/dp/1499073003> .

*Special Thanks to **Dick Blick** for graciously allowing Hildegard Center to link to DB lesson plans in conjunction with its “Art Bridges”. Dick Blick’s commitment to the educational community extends far beyond providing high-quality products at low prices. DB offers art lesson plans created for all ages and skill levels. Every project also meets several National Standards for Visual Arts education. PDF downloads and videos of these original lessons are available free of charge. Visit www.dickblick.com to see the many ways DB support schools, communities and art education and make DB your one-stop shopping destination for art supplies.*

If you have used this activity, we’d love to hear from you! Please send questions or comments through our website www.hildegardcenter.org .

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