

What is stimming? So stimming is something that autistic people do to kind of manage and reduce excess energy, and to soothe themselves, to help them feel calmer and more regulated. It can include things like moving your body, making vocal noises, or engaging in any other stimulation of the senses.

So stimming can include obvious things that we might call overt things, such as flapping the arms or the hands, repetitive facial movements, even dancing or pacing or spinning, stroking certain fabrics or materials, repeating words which we call echolalia, and making other noises "with the mouth or voice."

So stimming can be an action that basically shows when you are overstimulated. Now, when I stim, I start doing this. Now, the problem is with this is people can't tell if it's a method of me being super excited, which normally should tell by my face, or if it means I'm overwhelmed.

But again, the normal indicator now is how my face looks when I do it. If I'm smiling, grinning, you'll see me jumping up and down flapping. And that's how you know that's me stimming in a good way. But then if I'm stressing out a bit, I also have like a tic. I sometimes do like that kind of clench my hand.

When I get stressed, like at work because there's a meeting I struggle with. My hand starts doing that. Again, people do it in very different ways. I know some people who rub their hands like that, some people they drum which sometimes I do because I used to be a drummer, but yeah, everyone does it in a very different way some people do with their hair, but it's an involuntary action, essentially.

That just shows that that person is overstimulated. Stimming can also involve the senses, so things like looking at a lava lamp, enjoying looking at complex visual patterns, repeatedly covering your ears with your hands to give like an intermittent noise, making vocal stims, saying words out loud, maybe in an echoey room to get that sensation of the echo, and seeking out certain smells like essential oils or perfumes.

Stimming can also include some covert, or less obvious things. And maybe even subconscious movements, such as wriggling your toes in your shoes, chewing the inside of your cheek, moving your tongue or your jaw about, tapping your fingers or blinking twiddling your hair. These are sorts of things that are less obvious, and maybe less likely to be noticed by other people. You're less likely to be sort of called out on or drawn attention to.

So why do autistic people stim? I mean, this is for similar reasons as an autistic person might have a meltdown or a shutdown. It's a build-up of excess energy. But whereas meltdowns and shutdowns, are maybe a more negative way of releasing that energy. Stimming is usually a more positive way of releasing that energy.

So autistic people can stim just purely for enjoyment, such as a pleasurable, visual, aural, movement or balance sensation. Just to bring joy.

Stimming is something autistic children do to manage energy and self-soothe. This can be things like body movements, running, jumping, spinning or it can be less visual. And it can be things like sounds or smells or enjoying looking at things. And these can be less obvious in children.

For more information, view our website, Autism Space or text the ChatAutism Team for an answer to your questions within 24 hours. Monday to Friday on 07312 277097.