



Dr. Mary Barbera

Proven Autism ABA Strategies...Simplified

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## Six Steps to Reduce Minor Self-Stim Behavior in Children with Autism

1. Always start with an assessment of stim behaviors (as well as other problem behaviors) and language: What does the stim look like? What is the rate (estimate or count the stims in a short time interval)? When is the stimming most likely to occur? Are there any activities where stimming doesn't occur? What other problem behaviors does the child exhibit? I also recommend a language assessment. [You can start with my basic assessment.](#) After this basic assessment is done, I would recommend a full ABA/VB assessment such as the VB-MAPP by Dr. Mark Sundberg.
2. Make a plan to decrease problem behaviors (including stim behavior) and to increase language and learning skills. If the stim behavior is dangerous, contact a BCBA to complete Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) or Functional Analysis (FA).
3. If the stim behaviors are just disruptive but not dangerous, make a plan to work on language and social skills and avoid working directly on stimming. Ignore minor stimming by waiting 5 seconds until the child is still/quiet then redirect to an activity and engage your child or client.
4. When you have no one to engage with your child and you are busy (need to cook dinner or take a phone call), pick stim activities and toys that are as safe and as age appropriate as possible.
5. We can sometimes use the stim to our advantage to teach the child language and embed ourselves into something fun for the child. Let's say their self-stim

behavior is spinning around. Instead of saying, “Stop it. Stop spinning. You’ll get dizzy. You’re going to fall down,” which isn’t very positive, you can model, “Spin” and they can have one spin in the office chair with you controlling that amount of spin. You being added to that spinning activity makes it more fun.

6. Teach your child or client to mand for items/activities that are similar to his self-stimulatory activities. If the child likes to rock, for instance, then you could teach him the sign or vocal request for rock. I like to incorporate oversized rubber balls into the rocking because sensory input is sometimes very reinforcing. While on the large rubber ball, you can even further utilize this sensory input by incorporating even more language by modeling words such as, “rock,” “bounce,” “roll,” etc.

The key to stopping a stim behavior is recognizing that you cannot, in fact, simply STOP any behavior. Any behavior that is to be reduced must be replaced by an equally valuable or functional behavior. I have found that the best way to replace stim behaviors is to teach your client or child to use language and social skills and to teach them leisure/play skills that are safe and fun!

For more tips, visit [MaryBarbera.com](http://MaryBarbera.com)



*I am Dr. Mary Barbera and it is my passion to help autism professionals and parents. Over the past two decades since my son, Lucas, was diagnosed with autism, I became a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), earned a PhD, and have been studying autism and ABA. I also published [Turn Autism Around](#) as well as the **best-selling book**, [The Verbal Behavior Approach](#), which is now available in several languages.*

*Over the past few years I have synthesized the most valuable information and developed my own step-by-step procedures to teach others to implement proven ABA strategies and programming within homes and schools around the world. In 2015, I published an **e-book** ([More Talking, Less Tantrums](#)) and I launched Autism ABA Help: An **Online Program** for Professionals and “Gung-Ho” Parents, which has already been completed by participants from 90 Countries and 6 Continents.*