Materials That Listen Toolkit

Explanation for why it might be needed

Drawing as Stimming seeks to explore how drawing with different materials, not just on paper, can support non-verbal body-based exploration, whilst also enabling space to stim.

Drawing as Stimming aims to create a time where it is safe to stim or to respond with the body through drawing. Stimming is behaviour often seen in autistic or neurodivergent children and adults that can include repetitive actions, such as rocking or hand flapping or making noises.

Often stimming is viewed negatively because it is seen when an autistic child or adult is overwhelmed by sensory information. But, importantly, it can also be positive and part of a sensory-seeking journey, where the child or adult is responding to interesting sensory stimuli.
Masking or hiding stimming, something that children sometimes learn to do early can be painful. However, because stimming is so often misunderstood, linked with bad behaviour and seen as disruptive, lots of adults and children who have the ability to mask will be pressured to do so.

**How you might do it**

We would like to support you on a positive sensory seeking journey, with materials you can find at home. Let your body be your leader (as long as you are safe), explore the materials with your senses. Allow yourself repetitive actions. Allow yourself *long looking*.

To encourage you to explore materials in your own home.

What kind of materials would be good to encourage drawing as stimming?
Materials that respond to me:

Materials that allow my body to act on them easily are good. Responsive materials show the trace of the action of the body. Materials that bend and stay bent, or materials that show a thumb mark when I have pressed the surface. Highly responsive materials can be shaped easily.

Materials that you can move, arrange and leave a mark on to help you think about making your own artwork.

Can you find materials that are squaschy?

Can you find materials that can be scrunched and stay scrunched?

Can you find light materials?

Can you find heavy materials?
Examples of things you might find in the home:

**Paper** - this can be scrunched, or torn, moulded, and repetitive movements can be encouraged.

**Buttons** - these can be arranged into patterns, moved again and again. Picking up handfuls and running them through your hands can be soothing. Listening to the sound of them dropping might be nice.

**Tin foil** - this can be scrunched and unscrunched, rolled and unrolled, observing the changes of texture, light and form.

**Thread** - this can be wrapped around objects such as cutlery or chopsticks. The wrapping action can support body rocking and stimming.

**String** - spooling and unspooling, laying out lines like pencil marks, exploring different shapes.

**Plasticine, blu tack or clay** - to support actions of rolling in the hands over and over, squashing or making patterns.

**Cardboard** - this can be bent into shapes and will stay bent, it could be pierced repetitively supporting stimming action.

**Fabric** - feels nice to hold, can be arranged and layered to show different colour combinations and support visual stims.
You might want to use materials that are cheap and easy to find.

Can you do drawings of the materials you have explored (especially the ones you liked) in a sketchbook or on a piece of paper to remind yourself?

About the artist

Sam Metz is an artist working in the North of England. They create work relating to unpredictable bodies as a neurodivergent and disabled artist. They also research Drawing as Stimming, a process to validate stimming and non-verbal communication. Recent commissions have included an Unlimited emerging artist bursary and a research grant with Necessity.

Social media links are @chippedpale for both twitter and instagram

The Materials That Listen resource is part of the Personal Touch festival at Wellcome Collection.

Part of Feeling Our Way, a programme of in-person and online encounters co-curated by Touretteshero.