20. Make peace with fidgeting

Think of it as brain development, which it is. Then think of how to make room for it in the classroom.

I learned that fidgeting and movement can have a very positive impact on learning by observing my son. He always listened better when his hands were busy. I started reading about this phenomenon in educational journals—this was when Daniel was in fourth grade—and I realized his teacher needed to ease up on him. I had been called to have a parent-teacher conference because, apparently, Daniel was knitting in the back row while his teacher was lecturing up front. To his teacher, this meant Daniel wasn’t paying attention. I asked if Daniel was distracting the other kids, or if he was being rude, or doing poorly. I got “no” on all counts. So either the teacher didn’t get it, or he didn’t like the fact that Daniel was a great knitter! This was back in the 1980s!

—Helen Hirsh Spence, educational consultant to VS Furniture

My sister-in-law is a teacher, and she does a lot of tutoring at home in the summer. She was tutoring her neighbor’s son who was always wanting to move, and she said, “You want to move? That’s fine.” She got out the exercise bike, put it in the living room, and from then on he did all his lessons while he pedaled away on the exercise bike.

—Christine DeBrot, VS Furniture