

Calming the Senses with a Simple Little Square

A stressed-out student. A sleepless professional. An anxious traveler. A new product created by a San Diego-based inventor helps these people and others soothe their minds through tactile stimulation in the form of a little fabric square called Calmios. This new anxiety-combating tool is a 5-by-5-inch double-sided textile, specially designed to calm the senses.

Calmios inventor Xan Bernay predicts that amid today's high-pressure lives, external stressors, anxiety and disordered sleep, "all sorts of people can benefit from this product. Anyone who needs a little calm."

Bernay, a San Diego attorney, had heard friends and colleagues brainstorm ways to decompress from intense situations. A few confided they slept with their old baby blankets. In fact, studies show that many adults still enjoy their childhood "lovies" or stuffed animals. A Travelodge poll of 6,000 British adults found that 35 percent of their adult guests tucked themselves in with a stuffed animal every night. Developmental behavioral pediatrician Dr. Barbara Howard told the New York Times that about 25 percent of young women heading to college reported having some sort of personal keepsake.

"I literally woke up in the middle of the night with the idea," she said.

That before-dawn idea evolved to a double-sided fabric square with a sturdy, reinforced buttonhole to loop one's finger through.

Then, things started moving very quickly. Within a few months, Bernay had commissioned prototypes and filed for a patent. She launched Calmios.com with the tagline "Focus the Mind, Calm the Senses."

"There's a lot of science to back up the idea that tactile stimulation can calm the mind and body as well as aid in restful sleep," Bernay said. "And self-soothing is a common tool among those on the autism spectrum. Many people can benefit from Calmios as a complement to traditional therapies."

Bernay called on friends to assist in the venture, from designing spreadsheets to sourcing supplies.

"I think my favorite surprise is so many of my friends have skills that are helping me turn this into a real business," she said. "I have teenagers helping with social media, college classmates doing public relations, and work associates 'test-driving' the product."

"The reaction is what has kept me working on this," Bernay said. "People I don't expect to be into it tell me it truly helps them keep their anxiety at bay. Even people who don't struggle with these issues simply enjoy touching the fabrics."

Lauren Farrell, a recent college graduate, said: “My anxiety level was high during finals, and then I remembered to grab my Calmios. I immediately felt less on-edge.” Her favorite is the “Blue Bunny,” which is fuzzy on one side and smooth on the other.

Bernay – who hand-selects each fabric combination – has named each Calmios combo, and once a seasonal style is “retired,” it won’t be sold again.

Bernay said that when deciding on a Calmios, it’s important to “find your feel.” Some prefer plush or flannel fabrics while others enjoy the sensation of gliding their fingers along satin or contoured fabrics.

“My Calmios is velvet on both sides and I only use it for sleeping,” Bernay revealed. “I’m not bringing my Calmios into court, but it’s definitely compact and discreet enough to do that. I keep a couple in my office for high-stress situations.”

Bernay urges fans of the product to share “how they Calmios” on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter. There is no “right” way to experience Calmios,” she said. “It depends on your anxiety triggers or other needs. However you choose to Calmios, it’s a great addition to your bag of tricks.”

“I’ve thought about Calmios being used in dentists’ offices, for example, where people are anxious and nervous. It might be nice for them to have a different point of focus,” Bernay said. “People of all ages who live with attention-related issues could find Calmios helpful, kind of like a quiet fidget spinner.”

Sheri Rosalia, a massage therapist who owns a day spa in San Diego, was immediately drawn to Calmios.

“It’s so intuitive. From the moment I picked up a Calmios and my fingers caressed the material, I felt a sense of relaxation come over me.”

Thanks to suggestions from her friends and other “beta testers,” Bernay has expanded Calmios beyond the basics. Some models are equipped with a Velcro pocket so users can slip in a sachet of French lavender or dried rose petals. Optional add-on “tactiles” include hot/cold pouches, squishy rubber shapes and smooth crystals. Or, insert an affirmative word or phrase and attach a charm.

Calmios and its upgrades are available via Calmios.com and its social media channels, and Bernay is already working to place the product in select retail stores. The suggested retail price for Calmios ranges between \$18 and \$20 depending on the material. The cost of herbals and tactiles vary.

“It was important to me that this product be made in the United States, with high-quality materials,” Bernay said.

“I love being a lawyer, but I’m finding out that it’s really fun being an inventor,” she said.