

TOURETTES – EVERYBODY TICS DIFFERENTLY

Why It's So Important For Educators To Understand Tourettes



There are no requirements for educators to become 'experts' in Tourettes. However, having a good understanding of tic disorders is important, given the high rates of students affected in a standard education setting and even higher rates in a special education.

A lack of knowledge about Tourette's can result in educators and parents believing that ticcing is within the student's control, leading to a management-based approach, with educators utilising inappropriate behavioural strategies.

For example, the young person may be punished for the 'misbehaviour' of ticcing or otherwise advised to 'stop it', or even rewarded for not engaging in tics.

Unfortunately, the mismatch between the young person's lived experience of tics as something that is outside of their control, and a punishment/rewards management approach often leads to stress and more ticcing, not less.

Similarly, the waxing and waning course of tics can often lead to a sense that an individual may be 'doing it on purpose' during a waxing phase.

A school-wide culture of familiarity with the involuntary nature of tics and tolerance of tics within the school can also lead to reductions in, and more appropriate management of Tourettes whilst reducing bullying by peers.

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It is important to use a balanced approach offering suitable accommodations for children with tic disorders that encourage them to participate in all school activities on their own terms.

In general terms, the aim is to create an environment that is emotionally 'safe' and where tics are proactively managed.

Management strategies need to be tailored to the individual child. For example, for some children, stress and unpredictable events will make tics worse, whereas for other students' boredom may serve to increase their tics.

In addition to management strategies suited to children with learning and disruptive behavioural difficulties, please refer to article #11 in this series for some general management strategies.



With children, active collaboration and feedback between family and school are essential to encourage appropriate classroom management and optimal curriculum planning. An example of this may be, identifying times of the day when a student's tics may be worse, fostering the young person's strengths and interests, and reassessing strategies in use to better respond to any issues that have arisen.

For adolescents and adults, appropriate adaptations may be needed at home or in the workplace.

Comorbidities such as ADHD and OCD are often equally, if not more, critical than the management of the tics themselves. Therefore, the whole child and their learning needs must be considered. It is for this reason that familiarity with some of the features of, and complexities surrounding tic disorders will assist educators and parents to better manage and understand the difference between oppositional and disruptive behaviours, and tics.

Adapted by Get into Neurodiversity for a global audience.

Valsamma Eapen, Rudi Črnčec, Sarah McPherson and Corina Snedden (2013). Tic Disorders and Learning Disability: Clinical Characteristics, Cognitive Performance and Comorbidity. Australasian Journal of Special Education, 37, pp 162-172 doi:10.1017/jse.2013.2

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