

10 Things Teachers Can Do For Students with Tourette Syndrome

It may surprise you to learn that you probably have taught a student with Tourette Syndrome (TS), and will likely again. Often teachers and school personnel, as well as physicians and families, miss the symptoms that are associated with TS. Studies estimate that 1 in 160 (0.6%) school-aged children in the United States have TS.

Remember, a child with TS is a person first...who happens to have TS. As an education professional, it is important to remain curious regarding how to teach and be supportive of a student with this complex neurodevelopmental disorder. While every student is unique, the following are general suggestions that may help a student who has TS or tics, to attain academic and social success.

1. Recognize that tics are involuntary movements and sounds that wax and wane and can change unpredictably. In many cases, students with TS will attempt to suppress their tics to avoid negative attention from others. While the tics may appear to be within the students' control and are being done purposefully, they are not.
2. Reduce Stress/Anxiety. Stress typically increases symptoms. Therefore, noting what factors increase stress and implementing appropriate accommodations or special education services will frequently reduce symptoms.
3. Identify the skills deficits that may contribute to increased stress/symptoms, as well as the strategies and supports to address the skills deficits.
4. Ignore the symptoms that can be ignored. This demonstrates acceptance and normalizes Tourette Syndrome and other related symptoms. Modeling acceptance can reduce both bullying and stress and may help the student with TS to focus his/her energy on academics rather than tic suppression.
5. Consider whether accommodations are needed for handwriting issues. Handwriting issues are among the most common difficulties for children with TS. Accommodations can include the use of a computer, tablet, a scribe, or having notes provided.
6. Be aware of co-occurring conditions, such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), which are very common for students with TS. The characteristics of these conditions are often more problematic and harder to manage than the tics themselves.

7. Be creative with interventions. Teaching life-long strategies and providing supports, accommodations, and modifications are typically more effective than relying on consequences.

8. Involve the student with TS in developing plans and strategies for managing symptoms that can be difficult or impossible to ignore.

9. Promote communication with parents or caregivers. Be sure to share the student's achievements and strengths, not just the weaknesses.

10. Use the Association's resources for assistance in developing supports and strategies.

To assist educators, The Tourette Association offers a variety of programs and materials designed to help with recognition and management of TS symptoms (tics) in the classroom and school environment.

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