

Specific Classroom Strategies and Techniques for Students with Tourette Syndrome (2nd Edition)

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For Tic Symptoms

- Tests taken in a separate location with time limits waived or extended.
- Educate the other students who come into contact with the child with TS. TSA has a peer in-service entitled “*Educating Classmates about TS.*” An advocate from the local TSA chapter may also be helpful.
- Provide a refuge where the student may go to calm down, release tics or obsessions, e.g. the Nurse’s Office, the School Psychologist’s Office.
- Give the child frequent breaks out of the classroom to release tics in a less embarrassing environment, e.g. the bathroom, the drinking fountain, a real or made up errand to run.
- If tics are socially inappropriate (spitting, swearing, touching people inappropriately), it may be necessary to brainstorm possible solutions (e.g., a spitting tic could be resolved by giving the child a tissue to spit into).

For Fine Motor/Visual Motor Impairment

- The use of a word processor is a reasonable and necessary accommodation.
- Occupational Therapy Intervention /Sensory Integration Evaluation.

- Tests/reports given orally. Waive time limits on tests.
- Shorten assignments.
- Verify all homework assignments to make sure they were copied accurately.
- Standardized test answers written directly in the test booklet and transferred onto answer sheet by teacher or assistant.
- Provide graph paper to help line up math problems or allow child to turn paper sideways.
- Do not penalize students for poor handwriting. Provide alternatives for doing tests, assignments, etc. (orally, taped).
- Do not penalize for spelling errors. Encourage the use of spell check.
- Provide class notes rather than having the student copy from the chalkboard or overhead.

For Obsessive Compulsive Symptoms

Obsessions and Compulsions can take so many forms that it is difficult to give a few pat answers to the problem. You must first assess the nature of the obsessions and brainstorm possible solutions.

Here are some examples:

- A student with an obsession to count words in every line that she reads was provided with books on tape.
- A student with a germ obsession is encouraged to carry Purell in his pocket to wash his hands when needed.
- A student who needs to have a perfectly sharpened pencil to write was given a mechanical pencil.
- A student with a symmetry obsession who needs to erase his work over and over because it doesn’t look quite right was allowed to use a computer for his work to alleviate the problem.
- Allow transition time between activities for students with TS and BE CREATIVE!

For Short Fuse Difficulties

Children with TS and associated disorders may easily experience frustration, overstimulation, and increased anxiety. Their most difficult areas are crowded hallways, the cafeteria, the school bus and the playground. They do not function well in an unstructured, disorganized classroom. They live daily with a disorder that never allows them to be still. They have difficulty transitioning from one activity to another. A large majority of these children also have sensory defensiveness. Any or all of their senses can become quickly overloaded causing them to be easily “set off.”

Here are some helpful interventions:

- Allow the child to leave the classroom 2 to 3 minutes early to avoid crowded hallways.
- Have a teacher aide nearby in the cafeteria to prevent confrontations. An alternative eating site with a friend is ideal.
- Seat the child up front on the school bus and educate the bus driver.
- Make sure that the child is in the classroom of a structured, but flexible teacher.
- Help the child learn to remove him/herself from the room before a situation escalates out of control.

For ADHD Symptoms

- Preferential seating in the classroom; up front on the side is ideal where the teacher can assist the child in staying on task. The center front is often embarrassing for the child with obvious tics.
- Provide a quiet place to work in the classroom. A headset with instrumental music might help block out distractions.
- Allow for freedom of movement. (A quick trip to the bathroom, drinking fountain, a classroom task).

- Structured, but flexible classrooms are the best setting for the child with ADHD. Change tasks frequently.
- Establish a hand gesture as a reminder to refocus and get back on task.
- Break down assignments. Give one paper at a time rather than several. Break down all long range assignments and projects into shorter more manageable parts; e.g., Part 1 may be due in 2 days rather than the entire project in 3 weeks.
- Reduce the length of homework assignments. Quality, not quantity is the important thing.
- Provide a daily assignment sheet to be filled out by the student and verified by the teacher for accuracy. The parent could then check to make sure that all the work is accomplished. Assist with homework prioritizing and management.
- Allow student to leave the last class a little early to pack up and organize materials. This will not only give the student a little more time, but will also allow him to be at his locker without the distractions of a crowded hallway.
- Provide an extra set of textbooks for home. Color code textbooks & folders. A blue folder goes with a blue science book.
- Do not penalize students who forget or lose basic classroom supplies. Keep a supply of paper, pens, pencils to lend. Parents could also supply these. If you're worried about getting your supplies back, take something in ransom, e.g., a shoe.

REMEMBER that children with TS do not want to be out of control. They may not always know how to avoid situations that cause this to happen. Always keep in mind that this is an expression of a neurological impairment and not necessarily bad behavior.

MEDICATIONS for TS have side effects which may affect performance and behavior in school. Use the school nurse and the parents as resources to keep informed about the medications the child is taking and what may result in the classroom.

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