

# Classroom Strategies and Techniques for Students with Tourette Syndrome

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Knowledge and understanding are key elements to creating an accepting and supportive educational environment. When everyone, from teachers, administrators, classmates, bus drivers and substitutes to cafeteria personnel all have information about Tourette Syndrome, students are provided greater opportunities for success. This brochure, while not all-inclusive, provides evidence-based strategies that will assist in developing compassionate and effective supports.

## FOR TIC SYMPTOMS

- Provide a separate test location with time limits waived or extended.
- Educate other students who come into contact with their classmate with TS. TSA has a peer in-service entitled “Educating Classmates about TS”. Contact your local TSA chapter to see if a Youth Ambassador is available to provide a peer in-service. If not, a video of a Youth Ambassador presenting to a class is available on the TSA website.
- Some students benefit from a specific place (as well as a back-up in case this is not available), where a student may release symptoms.
- Breaks, out of the classroom, can sometimes be helpful; e.g., the bathroom, the drinking fountain, a real or made up errand.
- If tics are socially inappropriate (spitting, swearing, touching people inappropriately), it may be necessary, unless the child is very young, to brainstorm possible solutions with the student (e.g., a student may suggest or agree to spit into a tissue as a solution).
- (In certain instances, students may be receiving specific clinical therapies outside of the school such as Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Tics (CBIT) or other types of protocols. Such treatments may require very different classroom approaches. In these cases, the child, family, or practitioner would engage the teacher and school directly.)

## WRITTEN LANGUAGE DEFICITS

- The use of a tablet or computer is frequently a reasonable and necessary accommodation.
- Provide accommodations to have tests/reports given orally. The use of a scribe may help to reduce many writing difficulties. Waive time limits on tests to reduce stress/anxiety.
- Condense or reduce assignments when feasible.
- Verify all homework assignments to make sure they were copied accurately.
- Allow standardized test answers to be written directly in the test booklet and transferred onto answer sheet by teacher or assistant; or provide a scribe to complete the task during testing.
- Provide graph paper to help line up math problems or turn paper sideways to calculate “columns” using wide- ruled paper.
- Do not penalize students for poor handwriting. Provide alternatives for doing tests, assignments, etc. (orally, taped, typed, or use of highlighters to “indicate” answers).
- Do not penalize for spelling errors. Encourage the use of spell check.
- Provide a copy of class notes rather than having the student copy from the board or overhead.

## FOR OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE SYMPTOMS

Obsessions and Compulsions can take so many forms that it is difficult to provide general strategies. You must first assess the nature of

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these symptoms. Learning strategies may require a team effort. Brainstorm possible solutions with the student, the family, and/or other professional personnel.

Here are some examples:

- A student with an obsession to count words in every line that she reads was provided books on tape.
- A student with a germ obsession was encouraged to carry a hand sanitizer 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 writing obsessions who either erases frequently or begins work numerous times was allowed to use a computer for his work to alleviate the problem.

BE CREATIVE by understanding the student's best learning style!

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### Anxiety Difficulties & Transition

- Allow transition time between activities for students with TS.

Many have sensory issues, and/or OCD issues which can be overwhelming and result in increased stress, anxiety and sometimes anger.

Encourage a student's self-advocacy by establishing a trust with the student that his needs will be supported with respect.

- Allow the student 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 may be ideal.
- Assign a seat in front on the school bus and educate the bus driver. A brochure is available for school bus drivers to learn about TS.
- Teach and support student to be aware of his own anxiety. Develop and support strategies that diminish anxiety through self-help techniques and environments conducive to calming himself.

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### ADHD & Executive Deficits

- Preferential seating in the classroom; up front on the side may be ideal where the teacher can assist the student to stay on task. The

center front may be embarrassing for someone with obvious tics.

- Allow for freedom of movement. (A quick trip to the bathroom, drinking fountain, a classroom task).
- Provide a quiet place to work in the classroom. A headset with music or semi-permeable earplugs might help block out distractions.
- Establish a hand gesture as a reminder to refocus and get back on task.
- Agree on a signal the student may give you to communicate an emerging need.
- 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.
- Provide a daily assignment sheet to be filled out by the student and verified by the teacher or another student/partner for accuracy. The parent could then check to make sure that all the work is accomplished.
- Assist with homework prioritizing and management.
- Establish a communication journal between an adult at home and yourself for needs-based strategies.

A resource or consultant teacher should be considered, as a part of the team, to assist with workload management and to assist other teachers regarding reasonable expectations for the student. This person teaches life-long strategies for organization and time management.

- Reduce the length of homework assignments whenever possible by eliminating repetitive tasks once a concept is grasped.

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### Occupational Therapy & Sensory Integration Dysfunction

Many students have particular sensory needs and

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an individualized sensory plan can be critical to the student's success.

Overstimulation, crowded hallways, cafeteria, school bus, playground and other unstructured settings are frequently areas of difficulty.

Students with TS often have difficulty transitioning from one activity to another because of sudden and unexpected stimulation of the senses.

Loudness, brightness, smells, touch and general

sensations can seem amplified to someone with sensory hypersensitivity. Alternately, hyposensitivity can make a student crave sensory stimulation. A low sensitivity to stimulation could lead to the need for loud and even harsh behavior and physical actions and reactions.

If you observe that a student reacts intensely (either way) to sensory stimuli, use strategies that help the student to cope in the short term and encourage student participation in a long-term plan with a specialist.

Successful strategies involve a process to accommodate needs that evolve over time.

To help guide you with appropriate accommodations, ask whether it is working to help promote the student's ability to learn over time.

Mutual respect and trust will facilitate strategies and techniques as well as positively affect the student's learning.

**REMEMBER** that people 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 remain informed about the medications the child is taking and typical side effects that may impact learning.

**Available (FREE) on TSA's website:**

**TS is More than Tics (Other Important Issues to be Considered):** [http://tsa-usa.org/aeduc\\_advoc/morethantics.htm](http://tsa-usa.org/aeduc_advoc/morethantics.htm)

**What is Tourette Syndrome:** [http://tsa-usa.org/aMedical/whatists\\_cov.html](http://tsa-usa.org/aMedical/whatists_cov.html)

**TSA Education Audio Presentations (audio with slideshow) - topics include Speech Pathology, Discipline, IEPs, Advocacy and more:** [http://tsa-usa.org/aeduc\\_advoc/audio\\_presentTSA.htm](http://tsa-usa.org/aeduc_advoc/audio_presentTSA.htm)

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