

What is Tourette's

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Embracing Neurodiversity





What is Tourette's

Introduction



Tourette's Syndrome is a neurological condition characterised by repetitive, involuntary movements and vocalisations known as tics. These tics can be motor (such as blinking, head jerking) or vocal (like throat clearing) Tourette's typically shows up in childhood, with traits often becoming noticeable between ages 5 and 10. The severity and type of tics can vary widely from person to person.

While Tourette's is often misunderstood, it's important to note that we do not have control over tics. Tics may wax and wane, sometimes improving with age or triggering under stress. Despite being a lifelong condition for many of us lead successful, fulfilling lives.

The exact cause of Tourette's is unknown, but research suggests that genetics play a role. The condition is more common in males, with an estimated 1 in 100 children displaying traits. Although it is not usually associated with intellectual disability, it can sometimes occur alongside other conditions such as ADHD or OCD. This resource looks at learning, communication and what you should know.



What is Tourette's Learning



Learning with Tourette's can sometimes be tricky, particularly in environments where focus and attention are needed for extended periods. However, it's important to recognise that Tourette's does not affect intelligence. Many individuals with Tourette's are highly intelligent and excel academically when given the right support.

Tics may sometimes interfere with classroom activities, making it harder to stay focused, take notes, or participate in group work. Sensory overload, which can trigger or worsen tics, may also affect learning. As a result, it is really important for educators to provide accommodations like extra time on tasks, minimising distractions, and allowing breaks when needed.

Many of us develop coping strategies to help manage tics, such as redirecting focus or engaging in specific activities to reduce stress. Sometimes we find something specific that really helps us. Having access to that thing/activity when needed is really important in supporting us.



What is Tourette's Communication



Communication can sometimes be affected by vocal tics, which might disrupt speech patterns. These tics may not reflect our intent. Many of us are able to engage in meaningful conversations, though we may have to work harder to manage tics during communication.

Some people with Tourette's may also experience challenges with social communication due to the nature of their tics, leading to misunderstandings or feelings of isolation. Understanding and patience from others can go a long way in helping to create a supportive environment.

Some of us may try to suppress tics when meeting or talking to people. This can be really hard work and exhausting. If you imagine staring at something and trying not to blink, when you feel the urge to blink become stronger this is similar to the need to tic. This can be particularly difficult at school or in work.



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What you should know

When some people think of Tourette's they might just think about people shouting out swear words. Whilst some people may have coprolalia (swear Tourette's) it's actually only about 10-15%. Many of us have tics that are more subtle, such as blinking, throat clearing, or facial movements, which may not be immediately noticeable.

It's likely that we know we have Tourette's so it's ok to ask questions, if we don't want to talk about it, we'll let you know. Sometimes our tics might be funny, that's ok too, as long as you are laughing with us and not at us.

Lots of people with Tourette's have amazing creative talents in fields like music, art, and writing. The impulsivity and energy that come with tics can also translate into unique and innovative thinking. Similarly, the physical coordination and focus needed to manage tics can help some of us excel in sports, particularly those needing precision or quick reflexes, like basketball or martial arts.