



Tourette syndrome and learning

Most young people with Tourette syndrome (TS) have no difficulties at school. However, some young people with TS struggle with learning in and out of school for many reasons. This information sheet suggests why some people with TS struggle at school and with homework. We have also included some strategies to put in place if you are struggling to make progress with your learning.

Suppressing tics

For some people, having vocal and motor tics during the school day can be disruptive or embarrassing. Many young people make great efforts to suppress their tics during school hours and this involves significant energy and concentration. Unfortunately, the energy and effort spent holding in tics can distract from classroom work.

Ask for help

Some people with TS can have specific difficulties with reading, writing or numeracy. If this is the case or you feel you are not making progress, speak to the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) at school and let them know. They should have some ideas to help support you in the classroom and at home. It might also be helpful to discuss the possibility of having an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or similar written up and reviewed every few months. This shows how you are progressing with identified goals and additional support. It might also be helpful to have a learning assessment with an educational psychologist particularly if you feel you are not getting on with your learning.

Noting down tasks

Sometimes, writing can take longer for young people with TS or they may not understand new ideas as quickly as other students in class. Writing information down from the board can also take time. This can cause difficulties with homework, as what is needed might not be clear from your notes.

Talk to your teacher about this to see if you could work out a solution. For instance, worksheets detailing tasks to be done for homework could help, or the teacher could write the task on the board a while before the end of class and leave it there for longer. Taping the teacher's instructions so you can play them back at home can help too. If you plan to use a laptop for taking exams, you need to have been using it as your 'normal way of working' for a while before the exam. You might find it helpful to take a touch typing course as well.

Organisation

The most common difficulty for young people with TS is concentrating in the classroom and organising homework. Certain approaches can help, such as sitting near the front or at the side of the classroom so you can hear what the teacher is saying clearly and read the board easily. Attending a homework club can help you understand all the work covered in class. Strategies like 'mind mapping' can help you plan your work too. If organisation is a problem, you could try thinking and planning before carrying out a task. For instance, asking yourself "what am I going to do now?", "how am I going to do this?", "is this the right way of doing it?" and "is this how I want the work to look?" can be helpful.

Moving to secondary school

The transition from primary to secondary school can be difficult for any young person but particularly young people with TS. Secondary schools tend to put more emphasis on self-management, need more organisation and involve learning lots of new rules. If these sound difficult, talk to a teacher before you make the move to secondary school. Having a timetable in your homework diary can be helpful, as can making checklists or maybe having a buddy who will help you out during your first half-term.

So, in short...

- Work out how you can take notes most efficiently
- Organise yourself as best you can
- Plan your move from primary to secondary school
- Ask advice from your teacher, SENCo or educational psychologist
- Have a look at the BBC Bitesize website at www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize for ideas to help you study

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