



Tourette syndrome and bullying at school

Bullying can be a problem for any child. Children and young people with Tourette syndrome (TS) may seem to be more of a target because they stand out. Their tics, obsessions, compulsions or hyperactivity might single them out from their peers. If bullying is not dealt with, it can lead to schooling problems, low self-esteem or even school avoidance. We realise that the child with TS may not be the only child in school with special needs, but hope that some or all of the following suggestions will be achievable.

What is bullying?

Any type of unwanted attention that causes upset can be classified as bullying. Bullying can be mental, physical or verbal. Mental bullying can be as simple as a child being isolated from a previously friendly group. Physical bullying can include getting pushed in the dinner queue or tripped up on the bus. Verbal abuse can include name-calling or sending threatening text messages. Bullying does not always happen in the classroom either. Bullies will find places or times when adults are not around, for instance, journeys to and from school or at break times.

What should we do?

- You should have an anti-bullying policy in your school. Make sure that it is kept up to date and that all staff have read it and understand what to do if they discover bullying. All bullying incidents, regardless of how minor they might seem, should be investigated thoroughly.
- Ensure that all staff who come into contact with the pupil understand TS and the possible effects it could have on their schooling. For more information on various aspects of TS at school, see our other information sheets.
- See if the school's anti-bullying policy includes any information about children with special needs. Helping classmates to understand a pupil's special needs is a good start. Talk to the pupil and their parents to make sure they are happy with the suggestion. Some parents may worry that this could bring increased unwanted attention, but this is rarely the case. In fact, a recent study shows that students feel more confident and accepted after they had told their peers about having TS.
- Help pupils to develop coping strategies. This can include role-playing sessions on how to cope with unwanted attention or to explain their tics. Some children find a humorous response helps to defuse awkward situations.
- Investigate whether further support is available. This could be through a classroom assistant or a peer-mentoring scheme. Talk to the child's medical team if the parents are happy for you to do so.

- Be aware of any changes in your pupils' behaviour. A normally talkative pupil becoming withdrawn and uncommunicative could be a sign that something is wrong. Sudden unexpected absences or illnesses might indicate that they are avoiding school.
- Put a scheme into place so that all pupils have someone they feel they can trust to talk to and report any worries. This could be a buddy system involving older pupils who mentor younger ones.
- Teach pupils that retaliation can make the situation worse. It is much better to walk away. By retaliating, they risk getting hurt. It is far better to equip pupils with the confidence to deal with bullying and report any worries straightaway.
- Use some of your citizenship sessions to explore bullying, how it feels and why people do it. Circle time is a good way of sharing experiences. Kidscape (see details below) produce helpful teaching activities for all age groups.

For further information

Kidscape

Helpline: 08451 205 205

Website: www.kidscape.org.uk