



Communication and Interaction Team

Autism and Tics

What are Tics?

Motor tics

Simple motor tics can include shoulder shrugs, facial grimacing and eye blinking. More complex motor tics can include twirling, pulling at clothes and touching people/objects.

Vocal tics

Simple vocal tics can include throat clearing, grunting and squeaking. More complex vocal tics can include making animal noises or noticeable changes in pitch/volume. Tics can take the form of repeating rude words or swearing, although this occurs in a smaller number of cases.

How to support children displaying Tics

The responses from the people around them when tics occur are likely to impact the young person's self-esteem, mood and anxiety therefore it is important that responses are carefully considered. There are a number of ways that those working with young people can provide support.

Whole class/school approaches that manage peers, teachers and family responses to tics, to reduce stigma

- Consider ways of increasing awareness of tics across the school.
- Ensure that all staff are supported in their understanding that tics are not something that the child can simply stop or control.
- Ensure that responses to tics are never be in the form of a punishment/negative consequence.
- Raise awareness that frequent tics may cause fatigue and that children may need opportunities for break/rest to support this. Plan this into provision for these children.
- Be aware of seating positions in the classroom for larger scale motor tics – allow extra space to accommodate these.

Anxiety management through appropriate individualised support and adaptations to social and physical environment

- Consider noting down/tracking when tics seem to be more prevalent (is there a pattern in terms of days of the week/times of the day/certain lessons). If a pattern emerges – use this as a starting point to develop support around these target times, which may involve environmental adjustments/adjustments around expectations/demand.

Identification of wider needs

Consider the presentation of tics within the wider context of the child's overall profile and consider the follow questions:

- Are there wider learning needs that are causing increased anxiety?
- Is executive functioning an issue? Can they organise themselves so that they can access lessons/learning opportunities? Are they able to process and respond to instructions that they are given?
- Do they demonstrate a high level of rigidity of thought? Could this be causing conflict throughout the school day?
- Are there sensory needs that are potentially causing overload throughout the school day?

Key points

- A child cannot control or stop their tics and asking them to do so is likely to cause increased anxiety/distress.
- Tics often increase and decrease in their severity and prevalence over time; there may be periods of time where the tics are not present, or the tics may change over time. This can add to the inaccurate view that tics can be controlled.