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Tourette Syndrome • OCD • ADHD
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Publishing:

*Nix Your Tics! Eliminate Unwanted Tic Symptoms:
A How-To Guide for Young People*

TECHNIQUES FOR DEALING WITH THE HIGH STIMULATION/AROUSAL INDIVIDUAL

☑ Keep a log-book of behaviours (e.g. explosiveness, irritability, peculiar noises, movements, fixations or rituals) and/or videotape instances. Chronicling the behaviours themselves along with the time, date, circumstances, others involved, and the reactions/initiations of others can help with potential future diagnostic processes. It can also help in the identification of patterns (daily, annually) and triggers (e.g. particular individuals, particular modes of interaction).

☑ When the individual demonstrates signs that they are overstimulated (e.g. withdrawal behaviour, irritability, inflexibility, an increase in odd behaviours, various signs idiosyncratic to that individual) time is needed for him/her to regain control and decrease his/her stimulation. Ensure his/her safety and the safety of others and then give him/her space and time. A discussion of the event and consequences may be warranted but must be done following an opportunity to regroup: the individual needs to be left alone to work through the arousal.

☑ High stimulation interferes with memory, emotional control, and the ability to reason at age-level. As an overstimulated individual does not have access to the neurological resources necessary to resolve and discuss conflicts rationally this process must be postponed until after this excess stimulation has been flushed.

☑ Allowing for a safe release or ‘flush’ of stimulation appropriate to the individual (e.g. a ‘tantrum room’, pillows to throw/kick/scream into, a punching bag, opportunities to run, sing, play an instrument, lift weights) will reduce the time that the person is unavailable to resolve an issue.

☑ As there is little that can be done other than wait out the storm and assist in its passing when an individual is overstimulated, the best strategies are ones which prevent overstimulation from occurring in the first place:

-Avoid any unnecessary contributions to an already high degree of stimulation: ask permission or warn an individual for touching him or her (even hugs), don’t force eye contact, avoid loud noises, bright lights, and/or strong odours. Speak without a raised voice and in a non-confrontational tone.

-Do not engage in or escalate power struggles: an overstimulated individual is not choosing to be belligerent and is neither spoiled nor stupid. (S)he has a challenge that is often contrary to his/her personality, goals, and intentions.

-Understand “automatic no’s” or “noncompliant silences” to requests — overstimulated individuals need a moment to process and incorporate new developments. Even an outright ‘no’ can mean ‘give me a second’, and often these individuals will accommodate after being granted that moment.



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- Prepare the individual for transitions. Give warnings that a change is coming (“The bad news is that in 5 minutes we are going to do something else. The GOOD news is that you are the FIRST to know about it and so you can get ready”).
- Transitions for and requests of the individual are often handled better if (s)he has been a part of the process. Teach him/her negotiation skills
- Humour is an excellent distraction tool when a person is escalating or “stuck”.
- Positively acknowledge restraints and efforts to ‘hold it together’ at difficult times.

