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Publishing:

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

T(r)IC(k)S #4: Overstimulation Part I

Everyone has heard the tales of little old ladies lifting cars in order to free a trapped grandchild. How their frail frames are able to muster such superhuman strength is a mystery. My best guess is that when someone loves someone else fiercely enough, every reserve in one’s body can be devoted to that person in and for an instant with nary a thought.

Imagine, though, that you are now the one holding this car. Imagine the phenomenal drain on every fiber of your being. Imagine that you are required to hold this car high not just for a brief moment, but for a sustained period of time. Finally, while engaged in this Herculean effort, imagine that the person you love under the car doesn’t seem to recognize the peril that they are in; instead they lounge leisurely beneath the wheels, chatting casually with you.

Since you love this person immensely, you attempt to reciprocate what seems to be their need at the time. Inevitably, however, the strain of your torn efforts shows: your words are short and your tone snaps, and everything about your demeanor is screaming that you’d rather not shoot the breeze at the moment – just please get out of harm’s way.

Incredibly, your loved one, still oblivious to the danger, can sense only your rudeness. Because you are being undeniably unpleasant, your loved one understandably reacts with hurt, surprise, and anger of his/her own, and begins to berate you, ALL WHILE STILL LYING UNDER THE CAR!! You are stunned and quickly become enraged by this complete lack of acknowledgement of your efforts: why are you trying so hard when it still isn’t good enough? Why not just let go?

This is what overstimulation feels like. All of the impulses, obsessions, rituals, sensitivities, and tics that we Touretters deal with daily, on top of the (school)work, volunteer duties, house chores, and social responsibilities that all people have. Keeping it all at bay in one’s mind is not at all unlike lifting a car, and descending into rage is not at all unlike dropping the car, completely spent in your capacity to keep it in the air any longer.

I am a person who, when growing up, wanted very badly to impress his parents, and make them proud. I am also a person who, since I first began dating, wanted to settle down with someone that I could shower with all the love, affection, happiness, and thoughtfulness that my TS intensity could muster. I’ve felt that I’m a good person. Yet, whenever I lived with other people, my behaviour seemed to change. It no longer matched my continuing intentions, and I found it uncontrollably frustrating that despite all of my efforts I still became this person that they and I would both dislike.

Years later I learned that the culprit was overstimulation. In the absence of any knowledge of why I was doing these things, and in the absence of any strategies whatsoever, living with others just involved too many other



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Overstimulation Part I Continued...

needs, too much action, and too many surprises. My poor beleaguered TS brain simply couldn't handle it all. So I yearned for control over my surroundings to make up for the absolute loss of control in my head that others had and took for granted. More control equaled less stimulation, and a lighter load to lift.

Living with a single roommate was better, and living on my own was pure bliss. For the first time, I had minimized and controlled the stresses in my life enough to be the person I had always wanted to be – giving, fun, and happy.

For a while, I fooled myself into thinking that I had “cured” myself and was now finally able to live with others, much in the way that medicated individuals convince themselves that they have been “cured”, and no longer need THEIR treatment. However, after moving in with my fiancée, who herself has a car to lift, I quickly learned my lesson. Just as the cost for taking medications is that you must continue to take them every day to maintain their effects, so it is with strategies. I have an advantage that I've never had before – both my fiancée and I now understand what is happening and why. Armed with this knowledge, we need to again find ways to lighten our carloads so that we can be the people we want to be.

Living with others, volunteering, overtime, heavy social schedules...everyone in life, not just Touretters, must pick and choose which weights will make up their carload, and which ones they will discard. Most weights in isolation are manageable; it's only when they all accumulate that a problem exists. The only difference with Touretters is that much of our carload is already pre-wired into us. That means we must be more selective in what we add on top.

Will conclude next time, my friends.

cheers!

Duncan

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