

A STUDENT HAS TICS: WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR KNOW?



Not every difficult behavior is a discipline problem. Counselors can help the team identify stress, anxiety, bullying, skill deficits, and neurological symptoms early before they become school avoidance or crisis.

WHY A STUDENT MAY COME TO YOU

- Anxiety, school avoidance, shutdowns, emotional outbursts, or feeling overwhelmed.
- Bullying, peer conflict, embarrassment, or difficulty explaining tics to others.
- Perfectionism, obsessive-compulsive behaviors, attention problems, or difficulty shifting between tasks.
- Repeated visits to the counselor, nurse, or bathroom during stressful classes or settings.
- Social-communication difficulties or behavior that others interpret as immature, rude, impulsive, or oppositional.

EQUIP YOURSELF WITH A TIC-INFORMED LENS

- Tics are involuntary neurological symptoms and may change unpredictably.
- Stress commonly increases symptoms; attempts to suppress tics can use significant attention and energy.
- Disinhibition: a student may know a behavior is inappropriate yet have difficulty inhibiting it in the moment.
- Co-occurring ADHD, OCD, anxiety, sensory needs, and executive-function difficulties may affect school more than the tics themselves.
- A sudden increase in behavior may signal overload, a skills deficit, or an unmet support need - not simply defiance.

WHAT COUNSELORS CAN DO TO HELP

- Be safe and nonjudgmental and offer a calm place to regroup when helpful.
- Teach relaxation, coping, and self-advocacy strategies without making tic reduction the goal.
- Ask which classes, settings, transitions, or peer situations make school harder.
- Address bullying directly, including imitation of tics.
- Collaborate with family and staff; support consideration of 504/IEP services when disability-related needs affect access.
- Help staff understand complex symptoms and **use TAA resources** for additional education.

QUESTIONS WORTH ASKING

1. What feels hardest at school right now?
2. Are you trying to hold your tics in during the day?
3. What makes symptoms, anxiety, or overwhelm worse - and what makes them easier?
4. What do adults do that helps you feel safe and understood?
5. Who at school do you want involved when you need support?

The TAA is here to provide personalized support, coordinate trainings, and more. Questions? Please reach out to programs@tourette.org or call 888-486-8738