

Meet Owen



He is reliable and practical
He is intelligent
He can bring a smile to your face
He can take the initiative

But Owen can't always control his own
movements and sounds

Tourette syndrome and coronavirus
We have adapted our guide to learning difficulties to take account of coronavirus. Find out new ways to support Owen in the current crisis.

Understanding Tourette syndrome

Tourette syndrome is a neurodevelopmental condition - which means that it is part of the make-up of the brain. It affects around 1 in 100 people, is more commonly diagnosed in males and may run in families.

People with Tourette syndrome sometimes lose control over the movements and sounds they make. Without warning, they may twitch, nod, jerk or make grunting, coughing or other noises. These actions are completely involuntary and are known as 'tics'.

Tics can come and go and vary in severity. They can be 'simple' such as a small movement or a single sound, or 'complex', such as speaking a phrase or making a series of movements. Most people will have a combination of physical and vocal compulsions, and may also experience difficulty in managing their emotions. A well-known feature of Tourette syndrome is an uncontrollable use of obscenities ('coprolalia'), but this is not very common.

More and more people are being diagnosed with Tourette syndrome as understanding about the condition improves. Symptoms tend to begin in childhood and are generally most prominent during the early teenage years.

Tourette syndrome is often associated with other conditions such as ADHD, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and coordination difficulties.

Tourette syndrome: strengths and challenges

Owen works best with consistency in the surroundings and people he comes across, as sudden changes and new situations may be hard to handle.

While the tics are involuntary, certain strategies may help to reduce and manage them. It is important that in every environment, Owen has a space for peace and quiet.

Put him in a position that builds on his reliability and energy. Use his intelligence and constructive ideas, and give him an environment where he can be focused and stay readily on task.

By ignoring the tics and drawing on Owen's sense of responsibility and willingness to work hard, he can be given a chance to achieve his true potential.

In the coronavirus crisis, children and young people with Tourette syndrome may:

- Feel especially anxious, as tics/compulsions can be extremely 'suggestible' so tics such as coughing, sniffing, touching face and the like may increase as well as general ticcing
- Struggle to keep social distancing rules if they have 'inappropriate' tics/compulsions such as touching
- Be aware of the news, but be unable to process everything they hear, leading to a lot of confusion
- Find it very hard to adapt to learning at home – establishing new routines may be especially difficult

Here are a few ways we can all support Owen during the coronavirus crisis and lockdown:

General

- Avoid reacting to the tics and keep calm
- Use distraction and keep Owen busy and focused
- Acknowledge that his worries are real, and many people feel the same

At home

- Have reliable routines
 - Routines don't need to mirror the school day, find the routine that works best for Owen, and for you
 - Build in plenty of breaks, somewhere away from reminders about the lockdown

- Provide structure to the day
- Help him to find a hobby to concentrate on

When you help Owen to keep learning at home, think about these general tips for schools and see if you can also do these things:

At school

- Remind Staff that tics/compulsions may mimic coronavirus symptoms, break social distancing rules or seem inappropriate
- Break assignments into manageable sections
- Talk together to agree the best classroom strategies
- Make sure Owen can have regular breaks
- Give him plenty of time to complete tasks and allow extra time for tests

At the hospital

- The hospital might have some different processes than usual, find these out in advance if you can
- Remind Staff that tics/compulsions may mimic coronavirus symptoms, break social distancing rules or seem inappropriate
- Ensure Owen sees the same staff regularly
- Provide activities to occupy Owen
- Consider the best time of day for an appointment
- Make waiting times as short as possible



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