

Neurodiversity Mythbuster Guide Sheet

Tourette's Syndrome

Understanding and dispelling these myths about Tourette's syndrome is essential to promote awareness, acceptance, and appreciation. Education can help reduce stigma and foster a more inclusive society.

People with Tourette's syndrome do not have inherently different thinking processes or cognitive differences compared to those without the condition. Tourette's syndrome primarily affects motor and vocal functions, resulting in involuntary movements and vocalisations called tics.

While tics may manifest in physical and vocal expressions, they don't impact a person's intellectual capabilities. Many individuals with Tourette's Syndrome have average or above-average intelligence and can think, learn, and reason in the same way as anyone else.

It's important to separate the neurological aspects of Tourette's Syndrome, which involve tics, from cognitive abilities, which pertain to thinking, reasoning, and intellectual functioning. People with Tourette's Syndrome can excel in various aspects of life, including academics, the arts, careers, and personal pursuits, just like individuals without Tourettes.

People with Tourette's Syndrome have neurobiological differences in brain activity and function, leading to the manifestation of these tics. It is part of the broader spectrum of human neurodiversity, which encompasses conditions like autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others. Neurodiversity recognises that these differences are a natural and valuable part of the human experience and should be respected and accommodated rather than stigmatised or pathologised.

Sensory sensitivity

Sensory sensitivity is a common feature in many individuals with Tourette's Syndrome. People with Tourettes may experience heightened sensitivity to various sensory stimuli, including touch, sound, light, taste, and smell. These sensory sensitivities can sometimes trigger or exacerbate tics or cause discomfort and distress. Here are some aspects of sensory sensitivity in Tourette's Syndrome:

1. **Auditory Sensitivity:** Some individuals with Tourettes may be particularly sensitive to loud or sudden noises. Loud environments can be overwhelming and may trigger tics or anxiety.
2. **Tactile Sensitivity:** Some people with Tourette's Syndrome may have heightened sensitivity to touch. Certain fabrics, textures, or physical contact may be uncomfortable or distressing.
3. **Visual Sensitivity:** Bright lights or rapidly changing visual stimuli can be bothersome for individuals with Tourettes. They may prefer dimly lit environments.
4. **Oral Sensitivity:** Some people with Tourettes may have sensory issues related to taste and texture of foods. They may have strong food preferences or aversions.
5. **Olfactory Sensitivity:** Heightened sensitivity to smells can be another sensory sensitivity in Tourettes. Strong or unpleasant odors may be more intense and bothersome for these individuals.
6. **Sensory Overload:** When exposed to multiple sensory stimuli simultaneously, individuals with Tourette's Syndrome may experience sensory overload, which can lead to increased stress and an exacerbation of tics.

It's important to understand that sensory sensitivities can vary greatly from one person with Tourettes to another. Recognising and accommodating these sensitivities can help individuals with Tourettes manage their symptoms and feel more comfortable in various environments. Strategies may include using sensory-friendly lighting, providing noise-cancelling headphones, and creating sensory-friendly spaces. Working with healthcare professionals and occupational therapists can also be beneficial in developing effective strategies to manage sensory sensitivities.