

Anger issues and Tourette Syndrome



This factsheet looks at what is known about anger in children with Tourette Syndrome (TS); what strategies help and what programmes are offered. Whilst it is focused on children the information will be of interest to adults with TS.

Anger and TS

Disruptive or angry behaviours are reported in many people with TS. For people with TS and their families, the disruptive behaviour may be a source of greater impairment than their tics. For most people with anger problems and TS, the outbursts tend to occur several times per week and even per day. It is very common for an individual to struggle to explain why they have had an anger outburst and sometimes the episodes of anger can occur very quickly with what seems like little cause for the outburst.

Anger can result from being in particular situations and often the same triggers occur again and again. For most people who have anger, there is a co-existing condition such as attention, or anxiety disorder. Aggressive outbursts are more typical among older children. They can have major consequences for the person and are worth understanding well and seeking help to support.

Anger problems in TS are usually:

- Sudden
- Physical, mood and/or thought related
- Preceded by a sense of increasing attention
- Rapidly increase to a peak
- Related to a relief after an attack
- But not always difficult to know what the cause was
- Disruptive on family life.

Studies have shown that there are certain traits which seem to occur in people with anger challenges. People with anger problems in TS can be:

- Rigid thinkers
- Concrete in adaptive skills (struggle to manage change in plans)
- Low frustration level
- Easily over-stimulated and over-whelmed
- Frustrated or feel embarrassed by the events
- More likely when they feel tired
- Most likely to have outbursts at home than school or other places
- Most likely to direct outbursts at mothers, fathers and brothers and sisters.

The role of the family

There are various ways in which the family can support people with anger in TS:

- Understanding TS and co-occurring disorders (especially attention and learning disorders).
- Develop strong parental skills – providing stability and predictability in the family.
- Handling the problems of other family members.
- Reducing triggers which may be associated with the anger outbursts.

Managing anger in TS

It can be very helpful to understand what the triggers and consequences of getting angry can be. Working with a therapist who can help understand the situations which

tend to be associated with anger problems is useful. This may involve keeping a diary of when the events occur and working together to change the situations. This may take a couple of weeks. Use of a reward system in which the individual with tics is praised and can win credits for remaining calm or managing their anger appropriately can be beneficial.

It is important to support parents by:

- Defining a child's strengths and acknowledging their difficulties.
- Defining the triggers of bursts of anger - certain situations, scenes, time, etc.
- Helping good sleeping to happen.
- Trying to reduce the effects of painful tics, frustration at school, negative impacts of tics.
- Talking about tics and co-existing difficulties in a healthy and calm way
- Increasing structure and predictability of events.
- Assuring time and space for relaxing.
- Reinforcing the time without outbursts.
- Not (accidentally) reinforcing the outbursts.
- Leaving time for anger to pass away - not quarrelling or lengthening the discussion.
- Allowing 'time-out' that is not seen as a punishment.
- Praising the child, if he becomes aware of losing control, or he overcomes his anger in a situation he didn't used to.
- Showing behavior patterns - deep breathing, leaving a frustrating situation, etc.
- Making available a "chill-out" place.
- Talking to the child about actual emotions and situations, when everything is calm.

Individual psychological work identifies examples of anger, attributes of anger, triggers and consequences and develops cognitive and behavioural strategies to cope with angry feelings.

Ways to keep cool

There are many ways that people with TS can help themselves stay cool and so limit the instances of anger attacks they may experience. These include:

- Get exercise every day

- Eat healthily
- Sleep well
- Get to know your feelings
- Find a quiet place
- Find fun distractions
- Make good decisions about what you see and hear
- Choose friends who make you feel good
- Learn to forgive and forget

You may like to think about which strategies could work especially for you.

Talking therapies for anger is usually practiced by clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, nurses and other professionals. NHS referral to a clinical psychologist is mainly from professional sources including hospital consultants, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, nurses, physiotherapists and GPs. Tourettes Action's list of therapists includes clinicians working in both the NHS and privately and may offer talking therapy for anger.

If you wish to access a clinical psychologist privately then it is advised that you request a referral from a qualified health professional or make contact with a clinician using a website which lists only qualified members such as www.achipp.org.uk, who may have a specialist interest in working with people with tics.

Good books on anger management

You may find the following books useful to read on this subject:

- **A Volcano in My Tummy:** Helping Children to Handle Anger by Whitehouse & Pudney
- **The Explosive Child:** A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children by Ross W. Greene
- **Anger Management Games for Children:** Deborah M. Plummer
- **The Red Beast. Controlling Anger in Children with Asperger's Syndrome:** by K.I. Al-Ghani

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September 2018