

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH TOURETTE'S IN EMERGENCY DRILL SITUATIONS

EMERGENCY DRILLS SUCH AS FIRE ALARMS AND LOCKDOWNS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF SCHOOL SAFETY. FOR A STUDENT WITH TOURETTE SYNDROME (TS), UNEXPECTED SUDDEN LOUD NOISES MAY TRIGGER ANXIETY, EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND AN INCREASE IN TICS.

WHY MIGHT THESE BE CHALLENGING

Many neurodiverse students rely on structure and routine, predictability and calm environments to feel safe. Emergency drills can interrupt that comfort whilst also affecting the sensory system with sudden noises, flashing lights and quick movements. This can cause sensory overload, confusion, emotional distress, anxiety or even panic which can cause an increase in tic severity.



PRACTICAL TIPS

Below are some practical tips to help make these drills as smooth and supportive as possible, from planning ahead and supporting students during the drill to reflecting afterwards and preparing for future events.

AHEAD OF THE DRILLS

- **Warning ahead of time:** Pre-warn the student that the drill is expected ahead of time
- **Quiet/calm practices:** Do a walkthrough of the procedure at a quiet time, setting clear expectations and introducing unfamiliar terms/vocabulary
- **Personalised plans:** Write a plan with the student to have clear expectations of what will happen in the event of a drill
- **Adapt lockdown alerts:** Think about the 'sound' that is going to be used and make sure the student is familiar with this





PRACTICAL TIPS (CONTINUED)

DURING THE DRILLS



- **Offer sensory support:** Noise cancelling headphones, weighted vests and fidget aids as distractions
- **Trusted adult nearby:** Support, reassurance and a calm presence can make a big difference. Consider assigning a designated member of staff to each child who may need additional support during the drill.
- **Speak gently and remain calm:** Try to be calm around the child as they will most likely react to your emotions
- **Use visual supports:** Visual aids that students are already familiar with, such as cue cards, visual schedules or prompt cards, can help provide clear instructions, reduce uncertainty and offer a helpful distraction during the drill.

AFTER DRILL



- **Time to recover and reflect:** Give time to process and praise what they have been through, acknowledging how difficult this may have been
- **Quiet space:** Offer a quiet calm area to reset and re-regulate after the drill providing regulating items
- **Watch for delayed reactions:** Keep an eye out for delayed stress responses. Some students may seem ok at first but show signs of anxiety and tics hours or even days later
- **Revisit 'What if' scenarios:** Allow time to talk through and address any worries/anxieties that may have arisen from the drill and any scenarios they may worry about in the future