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# COPING WITH SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITY IN TOURETTE SYNDROME

## SIMPLE AND EFFECTIVE TIPS



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Sensory hypersensitivity is a common challenge for individuals with Tourette Syndrome (TS), making everyday stimuli—such as loud noises, bright lights, or certain textures—overwhelming. This can intensify tics and cause stress, making social situations more difficult. Understanding and managing these sensory triggers is key to improving comfort and quality of life.

This ebook offers practical strategies to help individuals with TS and their peers create a more supportive and sensory-friendly environment. Simple adjustments, such as reducing background noise, allowing breaks in overwhelming situations, and using sensory tools, can make a big difference. By fostering awareness and support among peers, those with TS can feel more at ease in social interactions.

Beyond individual strategies, this guide highlights the role of peer support. At the end of the book, we suggest group activities designed to help young people explore sensory sensitivities together. These exercises encourage empathy, self-expression, and a better understanding of the challenges faced by those with TS.

Whether you have Tourette Syndrome or want to support a friend who does, this book provides practical tools to navigate sensory hypersensitivity, strengthen friendships, and create a more inclusive and understanding social environment.

# MANAGE ENVIRONMENTAL STIMULUS

## **USE NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES**

NOISE CAN BE ONE OF THE MAIN TRIGGERS OF SENSORY OVERLOAD. UNEXPECTED OR CONTINUOUS SOUNDS, SUCH AS TRAFFIC NOISE, MACHINES OR VOICES IN BUSY PLACES, CAN INTENSIFY DISCOMFORT. USING NOISE-CANCELLING HEADPHONES CAN HELP REDUCE THESE STIMULI. FOR THOSE WHO PREFER NOT TO USE THEM CONSTANTLY, AN ALTERNATIVE IS TO USE EARPLUGS, WHICH ATTENUATE SOUNDS WITHOUT COMPLETELY ISOLATING THE ENVIRONMENT. ANOTHER EFFECTIVE OPTION IS TO LISTEN TO CALMING MUSIC, WHITE NOISE OR NATURE SOUNDS, CREATING A MORE CONTROLLED LISTENING ENVIRONMENT.

## **Create a study or work space with soft lighting**

FLUORESCENT LIGHT, COMMON IN CLASSROOMS AND OFFICES, CAN BE EXCESSIVELY BRIGHT AND INTENSE, WHICH CAN AGGRAVATE HYPERSENSITIVITY. WHENEVER POSSIBLE, OPT FOR WARM, DIMMABLE LIGHTS OR TAKE ADVANTAGE OF NATURAL LIGHTING. FURTHERMORE, POSITIONING THE COMPUTER SCREEN SO THAT IT DOES NOT CAUSE INTENSE REFLECTIONS CAN ALSO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

## **AVOID BUSY PLACES OR PLACES WITH INTENSE STIMULI**

ENVIRONMENTS SUCH AS CANTEENS, CROWDED LIBRARIES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT CAN BE EXTREMELY STIMULATING. WHENEVER POSSIBLE, CHOOSE LESS BUSY TIMES TO VISIT THESE SPACES. IF IT IS UNAVOIDABLE TO BE IN BUSY PLACES, TRY TO FIND A QUIETER AREA WHERE YOU CAN FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE. IN THE CASE OF CLASSROOMS OR MEETINGS, SITTING NEAR THE EXIT CAN ALLOW YOU TO LEAVE DISCREETLY IF THE ENVIRONMENT BECOMES TOO INTENSE.

## **CHOOSE COMFORTABLE MATERIALS AND CLOTHING**

TACTILE HYPERSENSITIVITY CAN MAKE CERTAIN TEXTURES UNCOMFORTABLE, SUCH AS LABELS ON SWEATERS, SYNTHETIC FABRICS OR IRRITATING SEAMS. CHOOSING SOFT, TAG-FREE, OR COTTON CLOTHING CAN REDUCE FEELINGS OF IRRITATION. LIKEWISE, HEAVY BLANKETS OR SOFT-TOUCH FABRICS CAN BRING COMFORT AND HELP YOU RELAX IN TIMES OF SENSORY OVERLOAD.

# SELF-REGULATION TECHNIQUES

## **Practice deep breathing and relaxation**

Sensory overload can generate anxiety and worsen tics. Learning deep breathing techniques (such as 4-7-8 breathing: breathing in for 4 seconds, holding the breath for 7 seconds, and breathing out for 8 seconds) can help calm the nervous system. Other techniques, such as guided meditation or mindfulness, can be useful in reducing the impact of external stimuli.

## **BRING SENSORY OBJECTS**

HAVING SMALL OBJECTS THAT HELP KEEP YOUR HANDS BUSY CAN PROVIDE RELIEF IN TIMES OF OVERWHELM. EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- FIDGET TOYS (SUCH AS ANTI-STRESS CUBES OR RUBBER BALLS), WHICH HELP TO DISPERSE THE FOCUS OF SENSORY OVERLOAD.
- STRIPS OF SOFT FABRIC OR OBJECTS WITH PLEASANT TEXTURES TO ALLEVIATE TACTILE HYPERSENSITIVITY.
- TACTILE RINGS OR BRACELETS, WHICH ALLOW SUBTLE SENSORY REGULATION WITHOUT ATTRACTING ATTENTION.

## **Use soft, familiar scents**

OLFACTORY STIMULI CAN ALSO BE A CHALLENGE, ESPECIALLY STRONG OR UNEXPECTED ODORS. CARRYING A SMALL BOTTLE WITH A FAMILIAR, PLEASANT SCENT CAN HELP NEUTRALIZE UNPLEASANT SMELLS. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO CHOOSE A SCENT THAT CONVEYS COMFORT.

# ADAPTATIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

## **WARN PEERS AND TEACHERS ABOUT SENSORY NEEDS**

If you feel comfortable, simply explaining the need to avoid certain stimuli can facilitate understanding and cooperation from others. It could be something as simple as:

*"I'm hypersensitive to noise and bright lights. If you see me wearing headphones or sunglasses in class, it's not a sign of disrespect, it just helps me concentrate better."*

## **Request adjustments to study and work spaces**

IT'S NOT ALWAYS POSSIBLE TO CONTROL THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT ASKING FOR SMALL ADAPTATIONS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE. FOR EXAMPLE:

- AS A GROUP, SUGGEST QUIETER PLACES FOR MEETINGS OR STUDYING.
- IN THE CLASSROOM, ASK TO SIT IN A STRATEGIC LOCATION, AWAY FROM NOISY WINDOWS OR AGGRESSIVE LIGHTS.
- IN THE WORKPLACE, IF POSSIBLE, REQUEST A QUIETER SPACE OR USE DIVIDERS TO REDUCE VISUAL AND AUDITORY STIMULI.

## **Take regular breaks to reduce sensory overload**

TAKING FREQUENT BREAKS CAN PREVENT SENSORY STIMULATION FROM BUILDING UP THROUGHOUT THE DAY. CREATING A ROUTINE THAT INCLUDES 5-10 MINUTE BREAKS TO TAKE DEEP BREATHS, WALK, OR CHANGE YOUR ENVIRONMENT CAN HELP RESTORE BALANCE. OUTDOOR LOCATIONS OR QUIET SPACES ARE IDEAL FOR THESE BREAKS.

## **Create routines - minimize surprises and excess stimulation**

UNPREDICTABILITY CAN MAKE STIMULI EVEN MORE DIFFICULT TO PROCESS. MAINTAINING A STRUCTURED ROUTINE, WITH CONSISTENT SCHEDULES AND ADVANCE PREPARATION FOR SOCIAL OR ACADEMIC EVENTS, CAN HELP REDUCE THE IMPACT OF SENSORY STIMULI. SOME STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

PLAN TRIPS TO AVOID RUSH HOURS.

ALWAYS BRING A SENSORY KIT WITH CALMING OBJECTS.

CREATE A FAMILIAR ENVIRONMENT, SUCH AS HAVING A SPECIFIC PLACE IN THE CLASSROOM WHERE YOU FEEL MOST COMFORTABLE.



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THE FOLLOWING GROUP DYNAMICS WERE DESIGNED TO RAISE AWARENESS AND PROMOTE EMPATHY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

The objective is for participants to experiment, reflect and develop joint solutions to improve coexistence and well-being in academic and social environments.

# **1, 2, 3 (4) GO!**



# ACTIVITY

## *SENSE OVERLOAD*

### **OBJECTIVE:**

ALERT PARTICIPANTS TO THE CHALLENGES OF SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITY, CAUSING THEM TO TEMPORARILY EXPERIENCE EXCESSIVE STIMULATION.

### **REQUIRED MATERIAL:**

- HEADPHONES WITH WHITE NOISE OR CHAOTIC SOUNDS (TRAFFIC, OVERLAPPING VOICES, SIRENS).
- FLASHING LIGHTS OR FLASHLIGHTS.
- THICK GLOVES TO MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO TOUCH.
- ROUGH OR IRRITATING FABRICS.

### **How it works:**

3. EACH PARTICIPANT USES DIFFERENT UNCOMFORTABLE STIMULI AT THE SAME TIME (EXAMPLE: LOUD HEADPHONES, FLASHING LIGHT AND GLOVES).
4. ASK THEM TO PERFORM SIMPLE TASKS, SUCH AS WRITING A SENTENCE, READING A TEXT OR SOLVING A SHORT MATHEMATICAL PUZZLE.
5. AFTER A FEW MINUTES, STOP THE ACTIVITY AND DISCUSS HOW YOU FELT, WHAT DISTRACTED YOU MOST AND HOW THIS MIGHT AFFECT SOMEONE IN THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIFE.
6. REFLECT ON STRATEGIES TO CREATE MORE ACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENTS.

# 2

# ACTIVITY

## COMMUNICATING WITHOUT WORDS

### OBJECTIVE:

DEMONSTRATE HOW SENSORY OVERLOAD CAN HINDER COMMUNICATION AND INCREASE STRESS IN SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC CONTEXTS.

### Required material:

- CARDS WITH KEYWORDS OR SIMPLE PHRASES.
- PAPER AND PENS.
- LOUD BACKGROUND SOUNDS (PLAYLIST WITH NOISES MIXED IN).

### How it works:

3. DIVIDE PARTICIPANTS INTO PAIRS.
4. A PARTICIPANT RECEIVES A CARD WITH A WORD OR PHRASE AND HAS TO COMMUNICATE THE IDEA WITHOUT SPEAKING (BY GESTURES OR WRITING).
5. THE OTHER PARTICIPANT TRIES TO GUESS WHILE THERE IS LOUD BACKGROUND NOISE.
6. SWAP ROLES AND REPEAT THE EXERCISE.
7. AT THE END, DISCUSS:
  - a. WHAT WAS IT LIKE TRYING TO COMMUNICATE WITH DISTRACTIONS?
  - b. HOW DID PARTICIPANTS FEEL TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE MESSAGE?
  - c. WHAT STRATEGIES CAN BE USED TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION IN CONTEXTS WITH EXCESSIVE STIMULI?



# 3

## ACTIVITY

### *THE GAME OF SENSATIONS*

#### **OBJECTIVE:**

HELP PARTICIPANTS RECOGNIZE DIFFERENT SENSORY SENSITIVITIES AND LEARN TO RESPECT THE NEEDS OF OTHERS.

#### **REQUIRED MATERIAL:**

- OBJECTS WITH DIFFERENT TEXTURES (FOR EXAMPLE: COTTON, SANDPAPER, VELVET, ROUGH PLASTIC).
- DIFFERENT SMELLS (ESSENTIAL OILS, COFFEE, VINEGAR).
- VARIOUS TYPES OF SOUNDS (CALM MUSIC, BACKGROUND NOISE, ABSOLUTE SILENCE).

#### **How it works:**

3. CREATE SENSORY STATIONS WITH DIFFERENT STIMULI (TOUCH, SMELL AND HEARING).
4. PARTICIPANTS GO THROUGH EACH STATION AND WRITE DOWN WHAT THEY LIKED OR WHAT MADE THEM UNCOMFORTABLE.
5. AT THE END, THEY SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND REFLECT ON HOW EACH PERSON CAN HAVE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE SAME STIMULI.
6. RELATE THIS TO SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITY AND DISCUSS HOW TO RESPECT INDIVIDUAL NEEDS IN A GROUP ON A DAILY BASIS.

# ACTIVITY

## *SENSATIONS FRIENDLY SPACE*

### **OBJECTIVE:**

STIMULATE CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION TO MAKE ACADEMIC SPACES MORE INCLUSIVE.

### **Required material:**

- POSTERS OR LARGE SHEETS.
- COLORED PENS.

### **HOW IT WORKS:**

3. DIVIDE PARTICIPANTS INTO SMALL GROUPS.
4. EACH GROUP CHOOSES A SPACE AT THE SCHOOL/UNIVERSITY (CLASSROOM, LIBRARY, CANTEEN, STUDENT RESIDENCE).
5. THEY SHOULD IDENTIFY POTENTIAL SENSORY CHALLENGES IN THAT SPECIFIC SPACE AND SUGGEST WAYS TO MINIMIZE THEM (EXAMPLE: QUIET AREAS, ADJUSTABLE LIGHTING, SENSORY REST AREAS).
6. PRESENT IDEAS TO OTHER GROUPS AND DISCUSS REALISTIC AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS.

MANAGING SENSORY HYPERSENSITIVITY IN TOURETTE SYNDROME INVOLVES SMALL ADAPTATIONS THAT CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN WELL-BEING AND CONCENTRATION.

Communicating needs to peers and teachers and taking regular breaks can help make the environment more comfortable AND FRIENDLY.

Reducing environmental stimuli, such as noise and bright light, using self-regulation strategies, such as deep breathing and sensory objects, and creating predictable routines are effective ways to minimize sensory overload.

With these SIMPLE measures, it is possible to reduce the impact of excessive stimuli and improve the quality of life on a daily basis.



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