



Information Sheet

Understanding Complex Motor Tics

Responding and Creating a Safe Environment

What Are Complex Motor Tics?

Complex motor tics are involuntary movements or actions involving touch. They may include:

- Touching objects or surfaces repeatedly.
- Light tapping or rubbing.
- Seeking specific textures or sensations.
- Touching others unexpectedly.

These behaviours are not intentional and may increase with stress, excitement or fatigue.

How can you help?

Do:

- Stay calm and neutral – avoid reacting emotionally.
- Offer discreet redirection if needed (for example, "Let's try using this fidget tool instead").
- Provide sensory tools like textured items, stress balls or Velcro strips.
- Allow movement breaks to help regulate sensory needs.
- Use visual cues and gentle reminders to support boundaries.
- Celebrate strengths and offer praise for effort and self-regulation.

Avoid:

- Drawing attention to the tic in front of peers.

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- Punishing or reprimanding for tic behaviours.
- Forcing eye contact or physical stillness.
- Removing sensory tools without explanation.

Toolkit (example)

Tool	Purpose	Example
Fidget items	Redirect tactile urges	Stress ball, textured strip.
Calm corner	Safe space to reset	Beanbag, soft blanket.
Visual schedule	Reduce anxiety	Clear routine with icons.
Movement breaks	Regulate sensory input	Walk to the water fountain, stretch.
Peer education	Build understanding	Age-appropriate discussion on neurodiversity.

Suggested Phrases

- "Would you like to use your sensory tool?"
- "Let's take a quick movement break."
- "I noticed you're doing really well with your focus today."
- "It's okay — let's try again together."

Key Reminders

- Tics are not a choice.
- Support builds trust and confidence.
- Small adjustments make a big difference.



Resources and Guidance on tics and Tourette's Syndrome

- NHS Guidance on Tics and Tourette's Syndrome:

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/tics/>

Clear overview of causes, management strategies and when to seek medical support.

- Tourette's Action (UK):

<https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk>

UK charity providing practical guidance for families, schools and professionals, including downloadable school support resources.

- YoungMinds – Understanding Tics and Tourette's:

<https://www.youngminds.org.uk>

Child-friendly information about tics and mental health support for young people.

- The Tic Disorders Handbook (Tourette's Action)

https://www.tourettes-action.org.uk/storage/downloads/1576769540_TA-Handbook-for-Schools.pdf

Comprehensive handbook for teachers and parents, with classroom strategies and guidance for supporting pupils with tics.

- Tourette Association of America – Educator Resources:

<https://tourette.org/resource/childrens-guide-tourette-syndrome/>

Though US based, this toolkit provides excellent, evidence-informed school strategies relevant to UK settings.