

Tourette Syndrome

Tourette syndrome (TS), also called Tourette's Disorder, is a neurological condition that becomes evident in early childhood or adolescence and is characterized by repetitive, stereotyped, involuntary movements and vocalizations called tics. Tics are often worse with excitement or anxiety and better during calm, focused activities. TS is often associated with additional diagnoses including Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive-compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Children who have TS have generally had many traumatic experiences before coming to The Harris School (THS). Due to their involuntary tics, these children are frequently the subjects of bullying, have been ostracized, and have been made to feel "different".

THS addresses the needs of children with TS in a number of ways. First, every child is respected as an individual. This culture of tolerance allows students with TS to feel comfortable and accepted, repairing the injuries often experienced at other schools. The classrooms are warm, incorporating rugs, soothing colors, natural light and floor lamps - a soothing environment for children whose symptoms are exacerbated by anxiety. Additionally, these children have the option to take "breaks" and find quiet spaces when they feel distressed. THS also addresses the conditions associated with TS, including ADHD and OCD. Kids with ADHD may not be able to remain sitting at a desk while doing their work, and at our school they don't have to. Our classrooms are set up to allow freedom of movement and choice about where a child wishes to work. We help children become empowered in the management of their symptoms, whether TS, ADHD or OCD, by helping them to become aware of what they can control and what they can't. This is done through our low student/teacher ratio, which allows the teachers to act as an outside ego support, giving constant reminders and redirection to aid the student as the day progresses. Many children who have struggled with these disorders have developed school phobias and internalized a sense of failure regarding school. Through positive, non-punitive interactions with teachers, and in the weekly group therapy for the older children, our students are helped to reflect on what has hampered their efforts in previous schools, and are given the confidence to overcome those issues and feelings.