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Publishing:

*Nix Your Tics! Eliminate Unwanted Tic Symptoms:
A How-To Guide for Young People*

T(r)IC(k)S #7: The “Big Secret”!! Part II

In our last chat I told you a bit about the damage I suffered myself from harboring a “Big Secret” for 19 years of my life. I said I believed that “coming clean” about your TS in the classroom is one of the most risky, nerve-wracking, and courageous leaps of faith that you could ever take. I also said I fervently believed that it is one of the best, most rewarding things you could ever do for yourself. I’ll now continue giving you the reasons why I believe this is so:

☑ **The elephant in the corner.** Don’t fool yourself – people see that you are different anyway. Whether they see the tics, whether they see the other symptoms that increase when tics are suppressed, whether they see the guardedness, distance, or low esteem that one emanates when one is harbouring a Big Secret, or whether they see the classroom modifications put in place by teachers who know about your TS, they all know something is up. People will come up with labels anyway - you might as well make sure that they are at least using the PROPER ones. Once, after conducting a very successful in-service for a boy initially petrified of others learning of his Big Secret, I asked the class how many knew this boy had had SOMETHING, even if they didn’t know what it was called and how to understand and react to it. To his astonishment virtually every hand in the room raised.

☑ **Big Secret anxiety eliminated.** By not talking about your “elephants”, you send a message to others that this is a bad thing, and they should therefore pretend they don’t see it (unless of course you are a bully, in which case you gorge on the feast). Everyone is uncomfortable, no one is talking, and it erects walls and heightens stress (therefore symptoms) which makes the classroom even MORE acutely uncomfortable. By “coming clean” and eliminating the stress of suppressing, the stress of worrying about what will happen if you are discovered, and the stress of dealing with ill at ease peers, you diminish your symptoms -- exactly that which you “came clean” ABOUT!

☑ **People can be more accepting than you think.** IF you give them the chance. It is unrealistic and unfair of you to expect people to understand who you are, what you have, and what you need if you don’t tell them. On my website (go to the “Life’s A Twitch!” link from the TSFC site) are letters from children who have been present at an in-service of mine.....one child wrote that before the in-service he didn’t know the boy with TS couldn’t help what he did. Another didn’t believe that such a thing as TS could even exist until I talked about it. Both then said they were glad they now knew so that they could be nicer to the child with TS.

Think of it this way: how would you react yourself if you saw someone running down the street waving his arms, rolling his head, and screaming in a frenzy? How would this reaction change if someone then leaned over and told you that this person was deathly allergic to bee-stings, and had a wasp down his shirt? Suddenly, given this context, your tolerance and empathy for the behaviour rises and you feel bad for your initial judgment of this person.



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The “Big Secret”!! Part II Continued...

☑ **Beat the bully!** Bullies thrive on perceived inadequacies, on unwanted traits, and in general on the elephants that make us uncomfortable and we wish to ignore. By openly discussing your TS, by thrusting it into the limelight and even joking with people about it, you succeed in robbing the bully of all his material. Suddenly the tables are turned – some will be curious about your TS and will want to ask questions, some will admire the courage and self-acceptance you showed, some may start to defend you to others who do not understand, some will shrug and say “so that’s what that was” and move on, but ALL will now be aware. This puts a bully on the defensive: imitations are more likely to be seen as rude and un-cool.

☑ **But why just take MY word for it?** Here’s what a young boy wrote to me after I came into his class and talked about TS:

Dear Dunkin,

Thank you for explaining to My classmates that I have Tourettes and that I'm not doing tics because I want to. Now I think they understand alot better. Now I have alot of new friends now. Thank you for coming in our class.

I only found out recently that this boy’s class wrote HIM a letter also! Here it is.....

to [the boy with TS]

-it probably was hard for you to tell us. -Sorry for being not nice to you. We thought you were just trying to bug us. especially from the girls We'll try to treat you nicer. -thanks for helping us with spelling -sorry for not playing with you sometimes and for the way our friends treat you sometimes -sorry we didn't believe you before when you tried to tell us about Tourette's. -thanks for being a friend -thanks for letting us know.

from: The class.

I wish more than anything I had received a letter just like this when I was 10, but I didn’t have the chance to know kids could be this understanding. Now YOU do though. Don’t blow YOUR chance, OK?

cheers!

Duncan

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