



ASK THE Expert THE

Evan Michaels, LCSW, is a licensed clinical social worker with TSA's New York City Counseling Program providing short/long term counseling to children, adults, families and groups affected by TS. He also provides educative presentations to professionals and has a private practice.

We have two sons. The oldest is fifteen and has TS—with OCD and ADHD.

Things were rough for him, but now, with the right medication, he's doing quite well. Our other son is thirteen. He used to be very supportive of his brother but now he's begun to act out and seems resentful of his older brother's achievements. How can we handle this new sibling rivalry?

While his older brother was enduring a difficult period, your younger son suppressed his natural drive to compete with his brother. Now that his older brother is doing better he is able to challenge and compete with him, without feeling guilty for hurting someone who is suffering. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that your son is in the midst of early adolescence. This time in his development is marked by his experiencing profound physical and emotional changes. It is a time when it is normal for him to be negative and rebellious. It is also a time when peer groups become more important influences than family affiliations. His rebellious behavior may then represent his striving to differentiate himself from his family and become more independent.

In view of this, the task of parents of children in their early teenage years is to help them to learn to be independent. Parents need to help their children to learn to separate and develop individual identities in healthy ways; and not be in rebellion. Although teenagers are striving to be free of their parents, it has been found that a high degree of communication helps them to do so in a well-adjusted manner. It is critically important that this communication be democratic, rather than authoritarian.

Talk to your son about what you see him doing and encourage him to express any feelings he may have about his brother or, indeed, yourselves. His feelings should be accepted. You should help him understand that his emotions do not have to "rule" his behavior. If he learns that he can sometimes act differently than how he feels he will gain better coping and communication skills. This will increase his self-confidence as he grows up and will help him develop a positive relationship with his older brother.

My husband and I are attempting to blend our families with children from our previous marriages. My son has TS and I know that he can't be expected to live by exactly the same rules as his new siblings. The other kids don't think that different sets of rules are fair, but his verbal outbursts (including coprolalia and echolalia) aren't easy to control. What should we do?

When blending families everyone comes in with expectations. People feel that others must absolutely accept *them* as they are but at the same time, their mindset might be—"the others will be as I want them to be," rather than, "they will be as they are."

All of you need to realize that blending families is a process. A major challenge in this particular process is that your husband's family needs to accept your son and his difficulties. Conversely, it is important for you, especially initially, to accept that your husband's family may have some difficulty with your son's TS.

A good first step is a family meeting at which you and your son educate the rest of your family about TS. This will help them to see that he is not in control of his tics and to understand what he goes through daily as

a person with TS. The new family members will be introduced to 'life with TS.' It is very important that during this meeting all the family members feel free to ask questions as this will demonstrate that you are going to be sensitive to their needs as well as to your son's.

My husband's family visits us every Christmas and every Christmas I'm told, repeatedly, that I'm a bad mother because of our daughter's TS and OCD symptoms. My in-laws don't understand—or won't understand—Linda's TS. What can I do to educate them? I dread the annual attacks and I'm sure my daughter is not happy about the visit either. She's only 10 now, but when she gets older I'm sure they'll switch their focus and direct their attacks at her.

It seems obvious that your in-laws need to be educated about TS, and specifically, about your daughter's TS. They need to know the facts about TS and OCD, and they need to understand the impact of these disorders. It is preferable that your husband take a lead role in educating his parents. But it may be even more effective if your entire family played a part in educating them.

You may need help with finding a way to communicate with your in-laws. Fortunately, there are now many sources of quality material about TS. The Tourette Syndrome Association has an array of publications that are on sale for a modest fee. Brochures and videos geared toward children, families and professionals are all available. Some public libraries and book stores carry good quality information about TS as well. With good, relevant and understandable information about TS, it is hard to believe that your daughter's grandparents would deliberately hurt her or you. If this continues to occur, it is clear that both you and your husband need to confront his parents, or construct boundaries to protect you and your daughter from their attacks.

VICTORY

A Scout to Shout About

High school senior Stuart McKee of Knoxville, Tennessee, has faced many challenges since his diagnosis with TS in fourth grade. His latest milestone is the honor of earning the rank of Eagle Scout. He is a credit to his family, community and his scout troop, too.

If You Are Moving . . . or are receiving duplicate copies of this Newsletter— please let us know so that we can update our mailing list. To update, we need both your old and new addresses.

