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I recently read about a teenage girl who acquired a service dog to assist her with her Tourette Syndrome symptoms. I think this would be a wonderful idea for my own daughter; I am just unsure how to proceed.

There are many sites on the internet regarding service/therapy dogs. You will want to research carefully since there are some organizations that are better than others. When you contact them, ask questions such as: How long have they been training and placing dogs? What is their success rate? Are there people who have used their service that are willing to be references you could speak with regarding their experience? What is their procedure for on-going support? Have they had any experience placing a dog with similar issues as your daughter?

Be prepared to tell them what function or specific service the dog will be providing. It may be that the dog is used for helping with social skills, or to assist with acceptance from peers. The dog may reduce stress and symptoms in a variety of ways such as sensory input. A dog may assist with mobility for people who have significant tics that interfere with walking.

You will want to ensure that your daughter is willing to accept the responsibility of being the dog's primary caregiver. The dog needs to bond with the person for whom they are working rather than a different person in the household. Also, it is not unusual for teenagers with TS to have a strong desire to not stand out in any way. It will be important that this not be an issue for your daughter. The process of receiving a dog, as well as the on-going training that is necessary, can be intensive and time consuming. Discuss all of these issues with your daughter as well as the organizations you contact.

My 12 year old son has trouble typing his school papers due to various hand and arm tics. I keep hearing about voice recognition and dictation computer programs that can help. Do you think this is something that would benefit him?

Like everything regarding TS, it depends on the individual. It is, of course, always better

if a person is able to keyboard successfully. If symptoms prevent this for your son, however, you may want to have him try the voice recognition software that is installed on many of the newer computers. These are generally not as powerful or accurate as the ones available to purchase, however, it appears that accuracy is adequate. It may be helpful to experiment with it to see if a voice recognition program is something that your son is interested in using.

If this software is used only for homework, you may want to let school personnel know because they may notice the difference in the amount and quality of homework versus written work completed in school. If his symptoms interfere with written work during school, you would need to ask that his IEP or 504 Plan be modified to allow this accommodation in school. He would most likely need to go to a separate location when using this since it requires speaking and would be disruptive to other students.

He is still very young, but it may be a good idea to introduce this to him now even if he does not use it as a primary means of completing written assignments. Some parents and teachers report that many young students struggle with using this software. However, it may be important to introduce him to this while he is willing to spending time learning the process. Older students often refuse to learn how to use this software because at first it may be typically slower than if they hand write.

Many schools have the software available, but I suspect there are some that don't and may object to purchasing it for one student. Teaching him how to use it now may be important in demonstrating that he has used it and can use it successfully.

If it is necessary for him to use this software in high school, it is important to begin the process of applying for SAT and Advanced Placement accommodations early. We suggest that a copy of the article regarding this topic, which is located on the TSA website, be provided to school personnel who will be assisting with the application process. Applying for accommodations can be more complicated for students with TS and this would be particularly true if a student requires voice recognition software during the test.

We are planning a family vacation to a theme park in the summer, but my son has issues with standing in long lines. I have been told that we can acquire "fast passes" to help us skip the long wait times. Is this true and how do we go about getting these special passes?

It is true but every park has different policies regarding this. It is a good idea to visit the website of the theme park and/or speak with customer service prior to going on vacation. Some parks allow the entire family to use the pass while others only allow the person with the disability and one other person who will accompany them on the ride. You may want to have a letter from a doctor stating precisely why standing in line for a long time would be detrimental to your son. The letter should be as specific as possible regarding how symptoms impact your child and not simply state that the person has a diagnosis of TS. As an example, waiting in line increases vocal and/or physical tics that can be disruptive for him and others. □

Holiday Gift for TSA

It's that time of the year again, and no doubt your collection of rarely-if-ever used ties, sweaters, picture frames and DVDs will get a boost. If you are looking for a more meaningful option, consider asking your family and friends to donate to TSA in honor of the holidays or any special occasion. TSA makes it easy by offering you your very own page on our online system. Our tools are user friendly and make it simple to create your own page, or you can select an existing page to customize as you see fit. Then simply email the page to your family and friends and they can make a donation on our secure online system. It's easy! For more information click on the "Donate" tab on the TSA website.