

6 Ways to Support Your Friend with Tourettes

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Tourette Syndrome is a two-sided coin. One side is that of the individual with the disorder, the point of view from which he sees the world. Then there's the other side, the perspective of all those who are close to that individual.

Tourettes can be an awkward thing to talk about. It's gotten easier for me as the years go by, but when I was younger, it was the last thing I wanted to admit to myself, let alone other people. And yet, sometimes it's just the elephant in the room, something you can't just ignore. As a friend, it's important to know how to address your friend's Tourette's delicately *and* honestly. It can strengthen your friendship, and it can build your friend like little else can.

Here are 6 ways to love on your friends with the neurological disorder, [Tourette Syndrome \(TS\)](#), as told by someone with Tourette's.



If You're Close to Someone with Tourettes...

1. Don't try to fix them.



The most important way you can care for someone with Tourettes is to love him as him as he is. When someone opens up to you to tell you he or she has Tourettes, it's a compliment. It means you're worthy of being trusted with what's probably a secret.

Don't rob your loved one of that confidence in you by trying to "fix" them. By immediately offering up the latest cure or treatment you've read about, you're just going to confirm what that person probably already believes about himself: that he's broken.

I can't tell you the personal anguish this has caused me. And while I know the people who tell me these kinds of things are just trying to help, it still cuts like a knife. If I want, I can see a doctor to get to medical help. What I want from my friends is acceptance. No, I want more than acceptance.

I want them to *love* me the way that I am.

If your friend with TS asks for help, then yes, do all you can to help. But please, don't offer that help until it's requested. Your loved one needs your love more than anything in the world. If you make him feel like he's broken, he'll feel betrayed and pushed away. He needs from you what doctors can never prescribe – love.

2. Address his tics according to his personal feelings and acceptance of his tics -

This takes listening skills and observance. Some people, such as myself, are very comfortable talking about their tics. But there are many people who aren't comfortable at all with talking about them. It'll take time to figure out your loved one's comfort zones when it comes to this, but the investment is well worth it. Your friend will feel safe with you, and that's something no amount of money or therapy can buy.



If your friend is okay with talking about it, then talk about it. But still remember to be gentle. He or she might laugh if you crack a joke about one of his tics, but it can still hurt deep down. If your friend makes a joke about

his own Tourettes, you don't have to be stone-faced. You can laugh. But it's better not to risk making jokes of your own. It's one thing to make fun of yourself. It's something else entirely when someone you love makes fun of something you consider a weakness.

3.) *Physical reassurance is often calming.*



Now, I mean this in a non-creepy way. As with all physical touch, it needs to be administered in response to the situation and the personal preferences of your friend.

For example, If you're two guys hanging out at a sports bar, and your friend has a ticcig fit, it's probably a bad idea to gently put your hand on his. There's a good chance he'll either disown you or deck you. Also, if your friend is of the opposite sex, you want to make sure you're not sending unwanted signals about the relationship. Still, physical contact, when wisely given, can be subtle and encouraging.

In my article on [anxiety attacks](#), I talk about how physical touch has been scientifically proven to lower stress. Remember that most tics worsen with anxiety. This means that simply putting your hand on your friend's shoulder can wordlessly send the message that you're there for her. Clapping your buddy kindly on the shoulder can be a manly way of showing encouragement. If the situation is appropriate, a hug can work miracles.

A physical signal of reassurance is great not only because it can help lower stress, but also because it's a way of saying you're there for your friend without having to announce it to everyone in the room. It means you've got her back, and you know she's going through a hard time.

Obviously, it would be weird if some of my friends did this to me, but my husband and my mom have something they do when we're in public and they can sense my tics getting worse. They'll gently take my hand and just lightly rub the top of my hand or wrist. It's not attention grabbing because we're obviously family, and it's a small enough motion to not be noticed by many people. And yet, the physical stimulation, combined with their encouragement, can really help when my tics are having a field day during church.

4. Please, don't point out the new tics.

Believe me, your friend is probably very aware of his or her new tic, and probably isn't very happy with its arrival. Pointing out a new tic is like saying, "Look, Buddy! You're doing a *new* weird thing!" Instead of being grateful, your friend will probably just get irritated. Believe me, this is not the way to start a conversation.



5. Look for signs of distress and offer subtle help.

We've already discussed the physical encouragement you can offer your friend with TS. Now it's time to think about other ways to support him or her. This can be anything from offering to talk (in private is probably best) to subtly offering a way out of a stressful position to going to bat for your friend when he or she needs it.



- Example 1: Your friend is displaying more tics than usual. It probably means he or she is under some sort of extra stress. Try to get your friend to talk.

You don't have to make it obvious by saying, "Gee, your tics are really noticeable today. You want to tell me what's wrong?"

Instead, just do what any friend might do for another. "Hey, you seem anxious. Anything on your mind?" This way, you haven't blatantly called attention to his or her TS, but you have opened up an avenue for conversation. This phrase is something that could be used between any two friends, no matter what the circumstance. All you're doing is paying attention to signals not everyone else might see for what they are.

- Example 2: You and your friend are at a party. Your friend begins to tic away. I find that fresh air, or even just a bit of space to reset my brain can help. If you notice your friend is showing signs of distress, you can offer a subtle escape like, "Hey, I'd like to get some fresh air. Want to come with me?" If that's not manly enough for the situation, you can offer to run an errand like buy more beverages and invite your friend along, something to separate your friend from the distressing situation.

(Chances are, if your friend does get some privacy, he might have what we in the TS world call a “tic fit.” Basically, all the tics he’s been trying to hold at bay will need to come out, and he won’t feel good until they do. Some people might feel comfortable doing this in front of friends, others may not. It will depend completely on your friend.)

- Example 3: This is the most obvious, but sometimes, your friend might need it. If someone is trying to deny your friend his rights protected by the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) by telling him he can’t stay in a restaurant or sit in a movie theater because he’s too noisy, don’t be afraid to stand up for him. Chances are, you won’t win the battle at that moment (Unfortunately, not all establishments care about the law until it’s shoved in their faces), but you will have shown your friend you’re there for him when it counts.

6.) While conversing, try to pretend your friend’s tics aren’t there -

I know they can be distracting, but sometimes, a normal conversation is something your friend might be dying to have. And yet, think about how hard it would be to carry on a conversation with people in the general public when your body is constantly interrupting you.



What Counts in the End

Remember, your friend with Tourettes is fighting battles on multiple fronts.

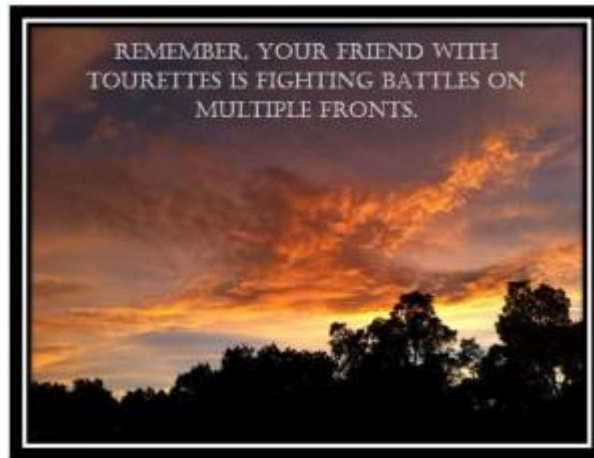
<p><i>1. First, there’s the Battle with the Tics.</i> As my tics are less obvious, my fight is usually conducted in silence. People don’t know I’m either suppressing tics or ticcing tremendously all the time. For others, the battle with the tics themselves is much more obvious. Either way, it’s not just distracting to others; it’s often very distracting to us as well, whether it’s obvious or not.</p>	<p><i>2. Then there’s the Battle of Acceptance in Society.</i> As TS isn’t a well-understood disorder, people with TS are sadly often considered weird, attention-grabbing, or lacking in self-control. Some people just wish they could walk down the sidewalk without getting odd stares or cruel comments.</p>
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3. *Third, there's the Battle of Acceptance in Family and Friends.* People with TS need the love and embrace from these people even more than they need acceptance from society. If you have enough support at home, you'll feel more ready to face the world.

4. *Finally, there's the Battle of Self-Acceptance.* Again, the support of family and friend is crucial here. People with TS often see themselves as broken or weird enough to deserve the scorn of others. It's a big step to accept that TS is a part of who you are, and many people don't get to that stage. In order for your friend to win this battle, he's going to need others to reassure him that he is worth love, affection, and friendship.

Chances are, if he knows others believe in him, the more likely he is to believe in himself. The chance to be this kind of support is tremendous, and if you have the chance to share it with someone with Tourettes, I can assure you it'll be a gift to both of you. It will require gentle words, patience, and time, and it won't be easy.

But maybe you can be that star to someone. Maybe you can be the love of Christ shining into his life. And in doing so, you just might change the course of his life.



Have you ever been able to give this kind of support to someone with Tourettes? Has someone ever shown this kind of love to you? Do you have any suggestions to add? If you do, please share them in the Comment Box below. Also, don't forget that if you [sign up for my weekly email newsletter](#), you'll get resources I don't include in my posts. Also, you'll get a "thank you" gift in return for signing up!