



New Jersey Center for Tourette Syndrome
AND ASSOCIATED DISORDERS

*Collaborative Partnerships
for the Tourette Syndrome Community*

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Skills groups at the Rutgers Tourette Syndrome Program are a unique opportunity for New Jersey families

PISCATAWAY, N.J. – Over the past decade, the Tourette Syndrome (TS) Therapeutic Program at Rutgers University has served the TS community by offering consultation, evaluations and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to hundreds of New Jersey families.

Until recently, the main treatment approaches – medication and CBT – have focused on reducing the frequency and intensity of tics, and on managing the symptoms of co-occurring disorders, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder and ADHD. These treatments are highly beneficial, but do not place a primary emphasis on social and emotional difficulties commonly experienced by children with TS.

More than ever before, research shows that the day-to-day challenges of living with tics can have long-term effects on a child's social and emotional functioning. Many experience anxiety, develop negative self-perceptions, are teased and bullied, and avoid social situations as a result of their tics.



In response to these challenges, the TS Program at Rutgers has developed groups that provide children affected by TS with the skills they need to better navigate a life with tics. The TS Program is currently recruiting for the next round of skills groups, which start on **Thursday, January 9, 2014**. The groups will run for 10 weeks on Thursdays from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at 152 Frelinghuysen Road on Rutgers' Busch Campus in Piscataway.

Prior to the creation of the TS skills groups, the authors – Dr. Meir Flancbaum, Dr. Lori Rockmore and graduate student Amy Kranzler – conducted a survey of TS families in New Jersey to determine the specific needs that could be addressed in the groups.

“The impact of TS extends beyond tics themselves” says Dr. Flancbaum, assistant research director at the TS Program. “The goal of our research is to better understand the difficulties facing children with tics and to develop skills-based treatments to meet their needs.”

The survey results were combined with psychological research on TS and the experience of the TS program clinicians to determine the focus areas of the groups:

- Education about tics and TS
- Identifying and managing difficult thoughts and feelings
- Solving interpersonal problems related to tics
- Improving communication skills
- Talking to others about tics
- Responding to teasing.

In addition, the groups provide a supportive environment for children and adolescents to meet peers with TS. Group participants discuss common experiences and rely on each other for advice about how to navigate the social world.

“The skills groups really enhance the comprehensive set of services we offer at the TS program,” says Dr. Shawn Ewbank, the clinical director of the TS program. “Many of the individual treatments we offer are intended for children who are struggling with tics or with one of the other disorders that are common with TS. The groups are more inclusive.”

“Even children who are not having major struggles will benefit from the groups, which promote self-advocacy and resilience,” Dr. Ewbank adds. “Most important is the opportunity for these kids to meet each other. Spending many weeks sharing about your experience with tics while listening to the experience of other kids with tics is a needed opportunity in the TS world.”

The fee for all 10 groups is \$200 ,with the option of a reduced rate for families with financial need. An initial screening is conducted determine if the groups are a good match for a child’s needs. Screenings are happening now. Interested families should contact the TS program by calling (848) 445-6111, Ext. 40150, by visiting <http://gsappweb.rutgers.edu/clinic/ts-clinic.php> or by e-mailing TS.Program.Rutgers@gmail.com.

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