

Sample Teacher Letter

Dear _____

Hello, we are Brandon Reynolds parents, Darlene and Gerry. Our son has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (AS). This is a high functioning autism characterized by and affecting key aspects of social understanding, language usage and sensory integration. Brandon has also a dual diagnosis of Tourette's Syndrome (TS). This is a neurological disorder characterized by physical tics such as involuntary, rapid, sudden movements or vocalizations that occur repeatedly in the same way. You will learn that our son has many strengths. However, it is Brandon's wish that we inform you of some issues that may become apparent to you as you work with him.

Let's begin with how TS presents in Brandon's daily life. He first and foremost wants you to know that many of the behaviors you will see are not under his control and are not a result of malice or willful misbehavior. At the same time, this letter is not an excuse for any bad behavior on his part. Brandon's tics include: stretching his lower jaw forward and sideways, thrusting his head forward, sniffing, throat clearing, and a bending and stretching movement in his toes (this explains an unusual gait). He also motions his arm out and punches himself in different areas of his face. Brandon's main vocal tics include an abrupt sound like 'hey' and a 'melodic sigh'. Other vocal tics he has include; echolalia (the urge to repeat words spoken by someone else) ; palilalia (the urge to repeat one's own previously spoken words) ; and lexilalia (the urge to repeat words after reading them). It is important to note that Brandon DOES NOT express coprolalia. This infamous tic is the speaking of socially unacceptable words or phrases (racist comments, sexist remarks, obscene words). People with TS feel an irresistible

urge to perform their tics, much like the need to scratch a mosquito bite. The effort to hold off a tic can be compared to holding back a sneeze. He is learning, though not completely successful, to hold off the urge to tic. However, this whole process uses up so much energy that he is exhausted by the end of the school day. It is often perplexing to us that people may find it hard to believe that these actions are not deliberate. We ask for your effort in understanding, as that has been key to Brandon's successful level of self-esteem.

Regarding AS, some general behaviors you may notice include autistic-like tendencies. He hand flaps and finger draws in the air while pacing and talking to himself. Brandon has challenges with certain aspects of executive functioning, which involves the skills of planning, multi tasking and transferring one skill set onto a different task. He is literal and needs clear instruction. At times Brandon may become overwhelmed by anxieties. This leads to an emotional upset displayed by crying. If he could be allowed to leave the situation and given some time, he will calm down. He has an inability to reciprocate socially with his peers. The reason in part is his preoccupation with the strict adherence to rules and telling the truth to a point of imposing this on others. He relates best with adults. Brandon displays an avoidance of gaze and his use of language and prosody is very distinctive. Brandon also exhibits a physical clumsiness of motor skills (dyspraxia) to the point of inability to ride a bike or use climbing apparatus. His five senses are at high level. Strong smells, certain touch (textures, materials, clothing), tastes (specific food preferences), levels of light (includes peripheral) and sound (fire drill) can create anxiety.

Perhaps the greatest challenge for AS children such as Brandon is that he cannot read social situations very well. He can be and has been a target for bullying.

We are actively involved in therapy (including medication). Brandon's support team includes a neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist, tutors, and an occupational therapist. We attend individual and group programs at C.P.R.I. in London.

At times some of our son's behavior may be annoying to you and members of the class. Please know that we appreciate your position, talents and many challenges that come with teaching and leadership. Brandon may treat you to a new and very unique view of the world that can entertain you at times. Please feel free to share with us whatever information or questions you like. No doubt you will learn strategies that may be helpful. Communication is the key and together we can provide the best for Brandon.

Sincerely,

Darlene and Gerry Reynolds