

Down Syndrome

Children with Down syndrome will be more successful in life with the continued support of compassionate educators, as well as continued support from peers and adults. Like all young people, individuals with Down syndrome are different from each other, and each child will have his or her own specific educational needs. In terms of behavior and personality, individuals with Down syndrome vary widely. Most are sociable, well-behaved, and sensitive individuals, while others may be challenging and mischievous. Children with Down syndrome will know if they are disliked, and can react badly if not treated well, or treated equally. Friendships can be helped to flourish informally, through peer support in class and around school.

Delays in speech and language skills, and in working memory development, are to be expected for all children with Down syndrome. Most young people with Down syndrome will not express themselves through clear and fluent speech, as they will typically experience difficulties in articulation and phonology. In addition, they have difficulty forming long sentences with correct grammar which results in somewhat telegraphic speech, and therefore they may be difficult to understand. They will benefit from continued speech therapy services throughout their teenage years.

Most children with Down syndrome will also have poor short term or “working memory.” These deficiencies make it more difficult for people with Down syndrome to access, understand, and process information at the same speed as people who do not have cognitive and language delays. However, this does not prevent them from learning many of the same things. They need information to be presented in a clearer, more ordered way, with explanation about the links and associations between information to build their knowledge system. Children with Down syndrome may need more time to learn and understand, and more practice to be able to apply their knowledge. Delays in gross and fine motor skills are associated with Down syndrome, and these will influence handwriting ability and participation in sports, in particular.

Homework should be planned to reinforce teaching of the most significant areas in any given subject. Set homework equitably for ability; it is important to ensure that the student is capable of completing each homework assignment. Visual symbols for each lesson can be added to make the assignments more interesting. The child may experience difficulties focusing in the presence of frequent interruptions and extraneous stimuli, and therefore creating an environment where the child can focus adequately on homework assignments will make the experience much more successful.

Overall, the majority of children with Down syndrome require a high level of assistance and support to function well, and good planning is the key to success. Communication between caregivers and educators is also essential, and will greatly improve the outcome for children in general, but especially for children with Down syndrome.

The following books are also suggested for parents who are working with children with Down Syndrome:

Delicate Threads, by Debbie Staub. This book provides information on the importance of friendships and the benefits of inclusion, as well as useful suggestions for families and educators.

Early Communication Skills for Children With Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals, by Libby Kumin, Ph.D. Dr. Kumin, who has 23 years of experience in working with children with Down syndrome, has written this book for both parents and professional caretakers to address language skills and learning techniques for the Down syndrome child.

Down Syndrome: the Facts, by Mark Selikowitz. Dr. Mark Selikowitz, a consultant pediatrician, has drawn on his extensive experience with children with Down syndrome to write this sympathetic and authoritative book, widely regarded as the definitive guide for parents.

A Parent's Guide to Down Syndrome: Toward a Brighter Future, Revised Edition, by Siegfried M., MD Pueschel. New edition of a 1978 collection of articles clarifying and giving guidance on parenting Down syndrome children.