

## Quick Facts about Children with Down Syndrome that Affect their Classroom Success

Children with Down syndrome (DS) have physical and health conditions that affect their success in the classroom. Here are some of the characteristics you need to be aware of and some tips to help support the student.

### **Low Muscle Tone:**

You may notice mobility, posture, breathing, speech difficulties, lethargy, and poor reflexes due to low muscle tone in your students with Down syndrome.

Ways to support your student with Down syndrome:

- Allow extra time to complete tasks
- Multisensory activities work well
- Use of a slant board
- Students may need positional support when sitting on the floor (pillow or chair)
- Desk height adjusted so that feet can touch the floor (or use blocks)

### **Hearing and Vision Problems:**

Many children with Down syndrome have hearing loss and vision problems. Recognize that a student may seem to be ignoring instructions, but actually may not be able to hear you. If you notice this happening alert

parents as these problems can greatly affect the student's ability to succeed academically and socially.

Ways to support your student with Down syndrome:

- Place the student's desk close to the front of the classroom so they can see and hear better.
- Use **simple** directions ex: "First work, then lunch"
- Use consistent verbal prompts
- Use visual supports
- Students with visual problems require a larger font.

### **Speech Intelligibility**

It can be difficult to understand students with Down syndrome due to low muscle tone, jaw movement, as well as hearing problems.

Ways to support your student with Down syndrome:

- Allow extra response time
- Allow the student to use a communication device
- If the student uses ASL learn basic signs to help with communication. Teaching these signs to peers can strengthen meaningful interactions.
- Don't say, "I can't understand you." Try something more positive, like, "Tell me more," or "Show me."

### **Memory**

Most students with Down syndrome have short-term and working memory difficulties. This makes it hard for them to access, understand, and process information at the same speed as other students. They may have difficulty retaining verbal and complex (multi-step) directions.

Ways to support your student with DS:

- Use visual reminders and prompts
- Give increased response time

- Use **simple** directions ex: “First work, then lunch”
- Break directions into small steps.
- Repetition is key (7-9 trials to learn to do something)

### **Ear Nose and Throat**

Students with Down syndrome typically have compact bone and soft tissue structures of the ear, nose, and throat which increases their susceptibility to upper respiratory infections and increases their sensitivity to loud sounds and vibrations.

Ways to support your student with Down Syndrome:

- Be aware of the noise level in the classroom warning the student beforehand if a loud noise is expected ex: fire drills
- If appropriate noise-blocking headphones can help.

### **Sleep Apnea**

Sleep apnea is common in children with Down syndrome. It can cause memory loss and may make students more tired and lethargic. It may also cause hyperactivity.

Ways to support your student with Down syndrome:

- If you recognize these issues in the classroom, talk to the parents so they can explore sleep patterns.
- Schedule more challenging activities in the mornings. Tiredness at the end of the day can increase the time needed to process information and directions and can cause frustration and behavior problems.