

Solutions

*A newsletter for educators published by the
Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota*

Curriculum Adaptation

Curriculum adaptations are not unique to young people with Down syndrome. Many young people benefit from having their educational programs adapted. The extent of curriculum adaptation will vary with some areas requiring quite extensive changes and others only minimal change. Curriculum adaptation will lead to greater opportunities for individual success and as success occurs there is a positive effect on self-esteem. This is true for both the student and the teacher.

Good practice curriculum adaptation examples include:

- **increasing the opportunities for success.** Although all students need frequent positive reinforcement, research indicates that students with Down Syndrome require more positive reinforcement than their peers. Something as simple as “star charts” can be used for younger students.
- **reducing the complexity of tasks.** Young people are often required to understand complex multi-dimensional tasks presented to them in the form of complex multi-dimensional directions. For all students, and particularly for those with Down syndrome, it is important that the complexity of tasks is reduced. This can be done through the breaking

down of tasks into their component parts and the teaching of the parts as a sequence.

- **using appropriate, simple language** and ensuring that the instruction/direction is understood. It often helps to use concrete examples.
- **providing numerous opportunities** for practice.
- **focusing on the essential skills** that will assist in the development of independence in post school years. These skills include managing money (and money machines), arranging social activities and social lives, simple budgeting, self-care and establishing and sustaining friendships.
- **ensuring that all curriculum activities and tasks are both age and ability appropriate.** Although this is sometimes difficult it is important, for example, that the reading material is both age and ability appropriate.
- **providing assistive technology**, both hardware and software.

Taken from Successful Inclusion Practices, an article written by two New Zealand teachers: Bernadette Holden & Pauline Stewart

Individuals with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given the opportunity to succeed.

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This newsletter is for you....

We deeply appreciate the important role you play in enhancing the educational experiences of students with Down syndrome.

The Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota is the only organization in this region focused exclusively on meeting the needs of people with Down syndrome and their families.

Education is a crucial concern of the vast majority of our members. One of our major areas of focus, therefore, is on supporting educational professionals.

Our Association is a resource for you. Our membership includes medical, educational and developmental professionals with deep insights into and broad experience with the developmental challenges of Down syndrome.

The Association maintains a Resource Lending Library offering video and audio tapes from national conferences, books and other materials addressing a wide range, including speech and language development, behavior, reading and math.

If you would like to know more, please visit our website at www.dsamn.org or give us a call at our office 1-800-511-3696 or 651-603-0720. Our offices are located in St. Paul and our staff welcomes your inquiries. We applaud your efforts on behalf of our children.

Kathleen Forney

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Steps to Develop a Positive Behavioral Support

1. Define the undesirable behavior(s) and set a meeting with the IEP team to discuss.
2. Gather information on when the behavior occurs / does not occur / and how long it lasts.
3. Develop a hypothesis as to what this behavior is achieving or avoiding.
4. Design a plan with team and parental input on how to replace this behavior with a more

appropriate and desirable behavior.

Remember—Behavior is, in and of itself, a form of communication. What is the behavior telling you?

5. Use the plan to collect data for a predetermined period of time (one week, three weeks).

Review the data that is collected to determine if the behavior has in-

creased or decreased. Examine whether the student has modified their behavior under plan.

Change the plan as needed until the undesirable behavior is extinguished.

It is imperative that everyone who deals with the student is aware of the positive behavioral support plan. Consistency in implementation will insure a quicker resolution of the undesired behavior.

Valuable Resources

[Classroom Language Skills for Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Teachers](#), Libby Kumin, Woodbine House

[Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Teachers](#), Patricia Logan Oelwein, Woodbine House

[Positive Behavioral Support in the Classroom - Principles and Practices](#), Lewis Jackson, Marion Veeneman Panyan, Brookes Publishing

[Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and other Hands-on Learners](#), DeAnna Horstmeier, Ph.D., Woodbine House

[Teaching by Design: Using Your Computer to Create Materials for Students with Learning Differences](#), Voss, Woodbine House

[Modifying Schoolwork](#), Janney & Scnell, Brookes Publishing

Transition tips

Students with Down syndrome may lack the intuition and reasoning skills needed to appreciate the rationale for why their schedule at home or school must change.

Transition time is the period of time when one activity or study period is completed

and the class prepares to move on in the daily schedule. Finishing off work to get ready to move on to recess, library, lunch or gym can trigger inappropriate behaviors. The student may be taken by surprise or be so involved in what he's doing that he decides he's not ready or willing to cooperate. However, with adequate warning and preparation, students can learn to flow with the class from one subject to another. Just as road signs warn us what is coming up ahead, providing students with meaningful signals ensure they are aware of the need to cooperate at transition times.

~ **Schedules, schedules, schedules** - gives structure to the day. Display prominently on the blackboard for the whole class, have a smaller daily schedule at student's desk. Use pictures or symbols for those who are non-readers.

~ For students who don't separate well on arrival at school, ask the parent to **arrive early at** school to ensure there is adequate time for the

student to settle in, feel comfortable with the morning routine, and meet friends on the playground.

~ Arrange the class in **learning groups** for activities, so the student is more apt to follow his classmates lead in cleaning up or following directions.

~ **Assign a buddy** to assist the student to move with the group. Students may exhibit less resistance when a friend is encouraging them to "tidy up" or "get in line."

~ Give the student **assigned jobs** such as taking attendance, being first in line, or handing out books, so they have a job to look forward to at transition times.

~ Just before the end of exciting periods (e.g., gym or recess), quietly **have an adult move to the student's side** so that when the bell rings or whistle blows to signal the end of the class, the student is within close proximity and is more apt to be responsive to directions.

~ Time is a tough concept for many students with Down syndrome to grasp. Giving the **"5 minute warning"** before transitions ... time to start cleaning up, finish putting away books at the library, start cooling down in gym ... eases them into the next task. Timers provide a

visual and auditory cue that "time is up."

~ Students with special needs may also need more time to complete tasks others take for granted (e.g., tidying up, dressing, toileting, eating) Giving them **a few minutes head start** ensures they are not always the last one finished and thus late for favorite activities such as gym, recess or lunch.

~ At the start of each day, **explain to the student any deviations** from the regular daily schedule (e.g., substitute teacher, special assembly, early dismissal). On these days, it is particularly important to increase supervision so the student has support in coping with changes from the routine.

~ **"Catch your students being good."** Praise them for checking their schedules, tidying up without being asked, asking a classmate rather than coming to the teacher, coming in from recess with everyone else and being first in line.

~ Transition times are often noisy and busy. Ensure the student has **heard the instructions, repeating them and rewording them** so they are appropriate to his level.

Watch your language, please

Communicating about individuals with Down syndrome with both positive and accurate language is important in education and advocacy.

The correct terminology is Down syndrome. There is no apostrophe and there is no capital "s" in syndrome.

The syndrome is named after the physician, Dr. John Langdon

Down, who identified the common characteristics as a syndrome in 1866.

A child with this condition is a child with Down syndrome, not a Down's child or a Down's kid in the classroom.

Parents will greatly appreciate your sensitivity when you address their child as "person first" and not merely as a syndrome.

Using "people first" language sends a conscientious message to others that people with disabilities are just that: people with a disability.

Remember, the emphasis should always be on the person first, not the disability.

How do Children with Down Syndrome Learn?

Great strides have been made toward developing educational practices that meet the needs of people with Down syndrome.

As with all children, there is a wide range of abilities, behavior and physical development among children with Down syndrome. However, as a general rule, most children with Down syndrome:

1. are visual learners. Pairing pictures with spoken words may be helpful.
2. require simple directions
3. work best with teaching methods that involve hands-on activities
4. are not as strong with auditory memory and auditory processing. Allow adequate response time.
5. work best with highly structured, sequenced learning activities. They do better if smaller bits of information are introduced at a time to process new information prior to moving to others.
6. have fewer short-term memory channels. Break down directions into smaller steps.
7. need time to process new skills they have learned prior to moving on to others.
8. have difficulty retaining directions or information that is only processed verbally.
9. have a slower rate of learning than typical peers.
10. work well with computer-assisted instruction. Computer programs are interactive, self paced and non threatening.
11. work best with small group instruction or one-on-one rather than whole class instruction. Peer tutoring also works well. *Children with Down syndrome are known for modeling behaviors.*
12. work best when meaningful materials are incorporated into the learning experience (e.g., when teaching sight reading words, start with familiar objects or words.)

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It is the mission of the Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota to provide information, resources and support to individuals with Down syndrome, their families and their communities. We are the only organization in our region devoted exclusively to meeting the needs of people with Down syndrome and their families. We are funded through memberships, private and corporate donations and various fund-raising events held throughout the year.

For a complete list of services and programs, please visit our website www.dsamn.org.

“Opening Hearts.....Changing Minds”