

Supporting Children with Down Syndrome



(National Down Syndrome Society, 2024)

Introduction - According to NHS (2023), CDC (2024) and Kids Health (2022), Down Syndrome is a genetic condition in which an individual is born with extra chromosomes. Down Syndrome is presented by three different types, all having similar physical features and behavioural traits. The three types of Down Syndrome are Trisomy 21, Translocation 21 and Mosaic Down Syndrome.

Identifying and Diagnosing Down Syndrome - NHS (2024) suggests that Down Syndrome can be identified during pregnancy. Parents will be offered a screening test for Down Syndrome between ten and fourteen weeks of pregnancy. This will assess the chances of the baby having this condition. If the screening test shows that the baby has a high chance of having Down Syndrome, the parents will be offered further testing to gain a confident and accurate result.

Down Syndrome can also be diagnosed after the birth of the child. Down Syndrome is often based, initially on physical signs including a flattened facial profile and nose, white spots on the coloured parts of the eye, and/or poor muscle tone. Intellectual development symptoms can also become apparent, these may involve a short attention span, impulsive behaviour or delayed language and speech development. However, if these signs or symptoms are not prominent, health providers can take a blood sample from the baby to confirm the diagnosis (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2024).

Benefits - Due to an early diagnosis, health problems gained can be managed well and has a variety of resources available for the children and families involved from health practitioners and outside agencies. Hauser-Cram, and Crossman (2014) states, “parents of children with Down Syndrome experience less parenting stress and enjoy greater parenting rewards than children with other developmental disabilities”. Children with Down Syndrome have a relaxed temperament, fewer problems in negative behaviours and tend to have more compliant response to others, are more cheerful, and have more positive personality traits.

According to Time4Learning (no date), self-paced learning, repetition and practice opportunities for children with Down Syndrome is impactful as the child begins to reinforce the aspects of learning. Children with Down Syndrome tend to engage and retain valuable information from visual techniques and interactive elements in active learning, as well as differentiated tasks to work at a level that matches their individual needs.

Challenges and Barriers - Children's Hospital (2025) says that most children with Down Syndrome tend to meet developmental milestones later in life than other children, including the ability to walk and talk. Children with a type of Down Syndrome often have a moderate intellectual disability and may have challenges regarding attention span, verbal memory and expressive communication Whereas, according to National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (2023), as children are born with the condition, other conditions may occur alongside, these can range from children experiencing visual problems such as cataract (clouding of the eye lens), hearing loss, blood disorders like leukaemia and celiac disease. These conditions are commonly found in children with Down Syndrome, as well as additional health issues. As children experience developmental delays, learning disabilities and other health issues, children begin to tackle their day-to-day experiences and activities, these everyday tasks can become a challenge to a child with Down Syndrome as their developmental, physical and intellectual delay becomes apparent, these tasks may vary between walking, getting dressed or communicating effectively (Sacks and Buckley 2003).

Inclusive Practice and Supportive Strategies - According to Er-rida, *et al* (2024a) and Down Syndrome UK (2024) Inclusive practices for children with Down Syndrome are vital as practitioners adapt their teaching methods and environments to meet every individual needs. Practitioners need to foster positive social interactions with both children and families as they ensure a sense of belonging is promoted through the child's experience within the early years setting. By implementing inclusive practice, a learning environment can help the achievements of children with Down Syndrome as they thrive to reach their full protentional, while also encountering an enriching educational experience.

Er-rida, *et al* (2024b) also suggests that, as early years practitioners support children with Down Syndrome, inclusive techniques, resources and areas should be produced to ensure all individual needs are met. Within the learning environment, addressing the unique learning needs of children with Down Syndrome can be achieved by practitioners who teach and adapt through inclusive practice techniques, this will ensure the best possible outcomes for the children will arise. For example, allowing children with the condition to learn at their own pace, are presented with visual aids, broken down tasks, multi-sensory learning and technology integration can be widely inclusive and allow different abilities to achieve their full potential. Often, children with Down Syndrome are encouraged more by practitioners celebrating their strengths and working as a team with peers. Working alongside peers with learning disabilities can be an advantage by the children effectively communicating together and building strong relationships, however, it is often noticed that children with Down Syndrome find it a challenge to communicate successfully due to their stubbornness and delay in development. As an inclusive practitioner, ethical considerations and assessments should be considered throughout every activity as according to Down's Syndrome Association (2021) every learner who has Down Syndrome is unique. All individual's abilities differ across all aspects of social and cognitive development. In a result of this, practitioners within early years settings need to be skilled individuals who understand current skills, abilities, strengths and interests as they begin to teach children the next steps through engaging in learning tasks. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, United Nations, 2006) identifies the relevance of the education of learners with Down Syndrome as professionals achieve inclusive education, lifelong learning and equal opportunities (United Nations, no date).

“Children with Down Syndrome have some level of learning disability, this means they may need help with daily life”, these activities and tasks can differ depending on the needs of the child. However,NHS (2025) and NHS (2023) suggests that set routines, singing songs, play, praise and grading activities can become support strategies for children with the condition. Grading activities supports the children as breaking down the instructions or steps enables the child to manage and understand effectively. This method of modifying how an activity is performed helps the children visual the details and allows them to achieve the activity at their highest standards (NHS, no date).

Conclusion – To conclude, Down Syndrome in children can have a variety of barriers and challenges to a child's life. However, Down Syndrom e can be supported well with an early diagnosis to support and care for the individual child and their families.

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