



Down syndrome

“For people with Down syndrome, the presence of an additional 21st chromosome represents a distinct way they are fearfully and wonderfully made.” -Stephanie Hubach

“I have one chromosome more than you. So what?” – Karen Gaffney, Speaker and Advocate for People with Disabilities

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome (not “Downs” or “Down’s”), or Trisomy 21, is caused by the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome. Down syndrome impacts people differently because people are different. People with Down syndrome have different strengths and weaknesses just like all humans, not because they have varying degrees of the condition -which is either present or not present.

(From [Understanding Down Syndrome](#), accessed 8/7/24)

- Visual Learners
- High capacity for empathy and social understanding
- Strong visual memory
- Self-help and daily living skills
- Adept with technology

Common Strengths



- Hearing and vision weakness
- Fine motor skill impairment due to low muscle tone
- Weak auditory memory
- Short attention span and distractibility
- Sequencing difficulties

Common Areas of Difference



To be a friend:

- Speak clearly and be precise, using concrete rather than abstract ideas.
- Routines are comforting so creating a dependable routine is important. Keep in mind that interrupting those routines or not giving enough time for transitions can be difficult.
- Using visual cues or showing (not telling) to reinforce communication can be helpful.
- Be patient with the struggle to understand boundaries and encourage appropriate behavior. Many people with Down syndrome are very affectionate and caring. Side hugs, high fives, fist bumps and positive verbal affirmation are great positive reinforcements.

Reminders for Interacting with Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

- Speak directly to, not about the person you are interacting with. If you need help understanding them, a staff member will be able to help you.
- Treat them their age. If they are an adult do not treat them or talk to them like a child.
- Be patient. When conversing, take time while they process what you said in order to respond. Don't finish their sentences for them.
- Assume competence. For example, an individual may not be able to verbally communicate but they may still be able to understand everything you say and respond in a different way.

References

- “Understanding Down Syndrome.” Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan, dsawm.org/understanding-down-syndrome/
 - DSAWM also has a fantastic booklet called *Nothing Down About Us!* That you can request by contacting outreach@dsawm.org.
- “About.” National Down Syndrome Society, ndss.org/about
- “Strengths and Challenges of Students with Down Syndrome.” Time 4 Learning, time4learning.com/homeschooling/special-needs/down-syndrome/strengths-challenges.html
- “The Gift of People with Down Syndrome” (Stephanie Hubach) byFaith Magazine, byfaithonline.com/the-gift-of-people-with-down-syndrome/
- Tips for Reading, Writing, and Speaking, With Ministries: withministries.org/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/