

Solutions

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

Communication is the Key

Children with Down syndrome have a wide range of communication skills, strengths and challenges. This article will focus on receptive language skills.

The skills that have been identified as important to school success are:

1. Ability to follow general rules and routines.
2. Ability to express wants/needs.
3. Following specific directions given by an adult.
4. Taking turns.
5. Interacting verbally with peers
6. Interacting verbally with adults.
7. Focusing attention on speaker/ eye contact.
8. Good listening skills.

Following are some ideas to achieve these desired skills.

Tell your student *what to do* rather than *what not to do* and give very clear expectations. When you are redirecting, make sure the student knows what you want to see.

Say “walk” instead of “don’t run” or “quiet voice” instead of “no yelling”, for example.

Where possible, show him by modelling the expected behaviour or use a picture of the action.

Make sure you use language children understand. Even a word like “don’t” can confuse; use “do not”.

Be sure to encourage and praise your student in a way that let’s him or her know that they are exhibiting the desired behavior.

Children with Down syndrome are very visual learners. Some classrooms have found visuals very effective for communicating expectations to young students. Often the young student will develop the habit of “tuning out” the teacher; a visual will provide the student with a fixed symbol of the word or idea.

There are many benefits to visual cues in a classroom.

- Cue or teach positive behavior or new skill.
- Enhance memory (they are great reminders!)
- Portray expectations
- Teach routine

Remember, young children often use inappropriate behavior because they don’t understand the social rules yet. Remember, you can support your students with Down syndrome—teaching is your strength!

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

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What Makes Successful Inclusion?

An Inclusion Teacher

Takes on the challenge of a multi-level classroom

Ever learning new teaching techniques

Accepts each child for where she/he is in life.

Changes teaching style to match individual learning styles

Has heart!

Expects the best each child can be and aims high!

Realizes all children are gifted—and its important to identify, recognize and highlight those individual gifts.

An Included Child

Challenged to be a shining star

Has heart

Improves interpersonal relationships

Learns to the best of his/her ability

Dares to dream of friendships and the future!

Tips for General Educators

Promote Socialization

Seat students with students. Adults sitting with students may discourage peer interactions. Encourage para-educators or classroom assistants to sit off to the side or away from the student.

Vary Your Instructional Method

Make learning an active experience for ALL students. Create cooperative learning groups and encourage partner learning. Provide a variety of materials and activities.

Establish Learning Goals

Work with the special education team to clarify learning goals for students with IEP's. Check to see that the student is continually working toward their objectives.

Share Your Lesson Plans

You are not alone. When you share your teaching plans, the special

education team can modify the content to meet the needs of students with Down syndrome so they can fully participate.

Treat Students Equally!

Maintain behavior expectations and disciplinary methods for ALL students. Share your expectations with everyone on the special education team.

Speak Directly to Students

Resist the temptation to talk through para-educators who accompany students. This is your student. Direct explanations and questions to the student directly.

Expect Success

Expect all your students to learn and participate in your classroom. Tell students what you expect. Adjust the demands of activities or assignments to match the students abilities.

Ask Content Questions Daily

When students respond to content questions they are practicing social and communication skills as well as learning content. Your informal assessments and observations can provide useful insights into possible curriculum modifications.

Share Ideas and Feelings

Express your fears and opinions. Phrase concerns in specific terms. Instead of saying "I don't think this student belongs in this class". Try, "How can I make this lesson plan meaningful for this student".

Remember, with team collaboration and focused efforts, most students can actively participate in the classroom.

Using the Buddy System in the Classroom

Implementing a Buddy System increases social interaction and appropriate play among children in the classroom. Peer buddies can help the child who has difficulty with transitions, difficulty remembering the rules and procedures of routines or who seems to need a lot of peer attention. It is also a nice way to give students experience in learning how to play together and how to compromise.

If your students are very young and may not initially remember who their buddy is, you can use sets of different colored matching necklaces to help them.

During the first activity of the day, recruit a child to be the peer buddy—they could be the peer buddy for a certain activity or for the entire day. Find a student who has good social



skills, behaves well and likes to help others. You might ask the child to be a peer buddy by saying “Emma, Joey has a difficult time remembering the rules and activity during circle time. Would you be willing to be Joey’s buddy? You can sit next to him and help him.” At this point, you can give them both necklaces.

Be sure to let the peer buddy know how long they need to stay with their new buddy. For younger students, this system might work best for a particular activity rather than the entire day.

Make sure you communicate what your expectations are—play with things together, work together on a project; walk together to the playground, etc.

Make sure to watch during the activity to be sure the buddies are working together—offer praise on a job well done to both of them.

When the activity is over, spend some time with the peer buddy. You can ask, “Did you play with your buddy?” “Did you help your buddy?” Again, provide plenty of praise. “Thanks for being Joey’s buddy; you helped him have a good time”.

The Importance of Socialization

We learn to be part of our world by living, learning and laughing with others. Students need to spend time together to learn how to live together now and in the future. Academics are only one part of why students attend school. Learning how to be human is the unwritten curriculum that permeates everyone’s learning. Inclusive learning experiences teach people how to respect and learn from each other. By being included every day in a classroom, a student with Down syndrome learns what it means to be a full member of a school community and visa versa.

Expect all students and staff to treat each other with respect.

Teach everyone how to “get along” with each other using modeling,

coaching, stories, real life situations and practice sessions.

Teach names of peers and staff using photos.

Model respectful behavior and use people-first language i.e., “a student with Down syndrome” rather than a “Down syndrome student” or a “Downs student”.

Teach about Down syndrome—invite guest speakers or read books that include a person with Down syndrome.

Create opportunities in the class or school that ensure everyone works toward a common goal. The jobs may be different, but the goal is the same.

Teach students to work together in groups, as peer tutors or to collaborate on projects; include various learning styles and expectations

within the group.

Teach and support friendship skills within the classroom. Use recess and breaks to practice these skills.

Facilitate cooperative games and social games that build relationships.

Teach about feelings and emotions; give suggestions for what to do when you feel a certain way.

Teach how to make choices; give opportunities for making choices and reinforce “good” choice making. Use peers to provide support or give you ideas when you are unsure. They often know a great deal about the student!

Taken from: “Teaching Students with Down Syndrome” by Carol Johnson, Information Manager, Canadian Down Syndrome Society.

Potpourri....

Got a Great Idea?

Do you have a great idea you would like to share with other educators? We'd love to hear from you. If you have a method you are using to create positive outcomes for your student with Down syndrome, please share it with us....and we will share it with your fellow educators.

Submissions can be emailed to Kathleen@dsamn.org. Please put Solutions in the subject line. All tips will be published so others will recognize the great work you are doing!

Educator Conference 2008

Did you attend the Association's first annual Educator Conference last September? We are pleased to announce that we will be holding our 2nd Annual Educator Conference in the Fall of 2008. Unlike last year, we will be holding this conference over the course of a week in three different cities. Watch your mailbox for further information. Some comments from our first conference.

"Excellent conference. We came hoping for one "gem" to help us and we are going home with a treasure chest".

"The best, most useful conference I have attended in over 20 years of teaching. The speaker was fantastic".

If you know of other colleagues who might be interested in receiving information about our Educator Conference or who would be interested in receiving Solutions, email us at Kathleen@dsamn.org.

Need Resources?

The Down Syndrome Association of Minnesota has a Resource Lending Library filled with many valuable sources of information on Down syndrome. In the past, you could only access this resource if you were a member of the Association.

Thanks to the generosity of one of our members, we have built an Educator section of the library. We will make these resources available to teachers without requiring membership in the Association.

Please visit our website at www.dsamn.org for a listing of the books available in the library.

Interested in checking out a book? Email Kathleen@dsamn.org

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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"