



### Basic Facts

- Down syndrome is a genetic condition that results in some level of learning disability, this affects a person's ability to learn, it does not mean they cannot learn.
- When a baby is born there is no way to tell what level of learning delay the child may have. People with Down syndrome are life long learners, there is no 'ceiling'.
- Having Down syndrome will not be the most important influence on how that person develops and lives their life. Family, environmental, cultural and social factors will shape their life just like everyone else.
- On average in the UK two babies are born every day with Down syndrome, there are approximately 40,000 people in the UK with the condition.
- People with Down syndrome are born with 47 chromosomes instead of 46 in each cell.
- Down syndrome occurs at conception across all ethnic and social groups and to parents of all ages.



## Correct Terminology

We cannot underestimate the importance and power of our words which reflect attitudes, beliefs and values.

It is vital to be factually accurate and inoffensive to people with Down syndrome, their families, friends and associates when speaking about any issue regarding Down syndrome.

Always use person first language; if it is necessary to refer to the condition, say '**Jack has Down syndrome**', never 'he's a Down's boy'.

Avoid the use of stereotypes and generalisations, e.g. "They are ...." Consider each child an individual as you would any other pupil.

Look at what a child **needs** rather than focussing on a problem, e.g. "**Billy needs extra time to get changed for PE**" rather than, "Billy has problems getting changed for PE."

Please describe people without disabilities as "**typically developing**" rather than "normal."

Avoid comments like, "You can't tell", "It doesn't look like they have it", "He doesn't have it that bad" or "My uncle's neighbour had one too." All are insensitive and derogatory and objectify an individual.

Avoid comments like "I can't believe how well he/she is doing" "She has Down syndrome but she's really pretty" or "He won!". This is offensive to people with Down syndrome and those who love them as it implies an expectation that the person can't achieve, be pretty or win....

Comments like "It must be so hard" "I'm so sorry" "What a burden" are unhelpful. All parenting has it's good and bad times, these suggest life with a child with Down syndrome is always bad, which it most certainly isn't.



## Common Myths about Down syndrome

### **Myth: Individuals with Down syndrome are always happy.**

People with Down syndrome experience the same range of moods and emotions as everyone else in the population.

### **Myth: People with Down syndrome are all so friendly and loving.**

This is a gross generalisation about what “all” people with Down syndrome are like. The assumption that all people with Down syndrome are loving and want to hug can lead to the encouragement of inappropriate social behaviour. It can also lead to strangers behaving in a way that we would not accept for typically developing children unfamiliar to them.

### **Myth: Individuals with Down syndrome are stubborn.**

A child with Down syndrome may not be able to tell you how they feel. This can lead to the false perception that he/she is stubborn.

### **Myth: People with Down syndrome suffer.**

Down syndrome is not a disease and people with Down syndrome do not ‘suffer’, people live with Down syndrome.

### **Myth: Children with Down syndrome should be educated in Special Schools.**

Inclusive education benefits not only the child with Down syndrome but also leads to greater understanding and less prejudice in the local community and ultimately in society at large. Research shows that children with Down syndrome do better academically and socially in integrated settings.

### **Myth: People with Down syndrome all look the same.**

While children with Down syndrome share certain physical characteristics, these will vary from child to child. A person with Down syndrome will look more like his or her close family than someone else with the condition.



**Myth: People with Down syndrome don't live very long**

This myth comes from the past, however due to the advances in medicine, particularly the ability to detect and treat heart defects, and the changes in attitudes within the medical profession the average life expectancy is increasing with many people with Down syndrome living into their 60's and beyond.

**Myth: People with Down syndrome cannot read or write.**

In the past public perception of people with Down syndrome was that they were incapable of learning and therefore did not receive any sort of formal education. Now we know that people with Down syndrome are very capable of learning; many people with Down syndrome are visual learners so for them reading can be a particular strength.

**Myth: People with Down's syndrome cannot achieve normal life goals.**

Every year more young people with Down syndrome than ever before are living in the community, gaining qualifications and experience and succeeding in a wide variety of jobs.

People with Down syndrome date, socialise and form ongoing relationships, including getting married.

Only fifty or so years ago people with Down syndrome were often placed in institutions where they lived their lives, unloved and unstimulated. Expectations were low and they received little if any in the way of support, stimulation and social experiences.

Research has increased our knowledge about the capabilities of people with Down syndrome and advances in health care, early intervention and family support have vastly improved the quality of life for young people with Down syndrome and their families.

Most of the young people growing up with Down syndrome today will lead ordinary lives in the community. Some people with Down syndrome may need very little help to live independently while some may require a lot more support.



## Learning profile of a person with Down syndrome

In general, children with Down syndrome develop more slowly than their peers, arriving at each stage of development at a later age and staying there for longer. Consequently, the gap between children with Down syndrome and their peers will widen with age. The degree of delay varies across developmental areas – motor, social, communication, cognition and self- help.

There is a specific learning profile associated with the condition – or a pattern of strengths and weaknesses. However, children with Down syndrome will vary as widely in their development and progress as typically developing children vary, and each will have their own individual talents and aptitudes.

Children with Down syndrome will all have some degree of learning difficulty. At the age of 5 the most able children are often functioning near the average level for their age. At the other end of the ability range there are children with profound and multiple disabilities often linked with conditions such as autism. Recent research suggests that between 15 and 20% of the population with Down syndrome are also on the autistic spectrum.

It is important that this specific learning profile is recognised in order that the most appropriate strategies are used so that children with Down syndrome can develop their knowledge, learn new skills and be included into school as effectively as possible.

This profile incorporates the following strengths and weaknesses: -

### **Areas of strength:**

- Strong visual awareness and visual learning skills.
- Ability to learn and use sign, gesture and visual support.
- Ability to learn and use the written word.
- Ability to learn from pictorial, concrete & practical materials.
- Keen to communicate and socialise with others.
- Tendency to model behaviour and attitudes from peers and adults.
- Structure & routine

### **Factors that inhibit learning:**

- Auditory and visual impairment.
- Delayed motor skills – fine and gross.
- Speech and language impairment.
- Short term and working memory weaknesses.
- Shorter concentration span.
- Difficulties with consolidation and retention.
- Difficulties with generalisation, thinking and reasoning.
- Sequencing difficulties.
- Avoidance strategies.



### Links to further information about Down syndrome

[www.downsed.org](http://www.downsed.org)

[www.down-syndrome.info](http://www.down-syndrome.info)

### Recommended videos to watch (You Tube)

**Just Like You** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5M--xOyGUX4>

**Dear Future Mom** - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ju-q4OnBtNU>

**Stand Up For Downs - Help Us Shatter Stereotypes**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-bPj\\_NK96w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-bPj_NK96w)

**Don't Limit Me** - <https://tinyurl.com/y55ernqt>

**BBC Things People with Down's Syndrome Are Tired of Hearing**

<https://tinyurl.com/y6kvt38x>

**We're More Alike Than Different** - <https://tinyurl.com/y4embcq8>

**Chromosomes R Us** - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VV3C\\_ydak](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0VV3C_ydak)

The best people to answer questions about Down syndrome are people with Down syndrome.

**Here is a link to the most asked questions on Google answered by people with Down syndrome.** - <https://cdss.ca/down-syndrome-answers/>

If you would like any further information about Down syndrome, please don't hesitate to contact us. There are support groups across the UK who run a varied programme of training events through the year for professionals to understand more about working with children and young people with Down syndrome.