



Student Success

Tips for Teaching Children with Down Syndrome

Welcome!

When our son, Paul, was born with Down syndrome 15 years ago, we had nice support but knew little about the best ways to help him learn and reach his fullest potential. Since we've started on this journey we have learned so much. We've found books and attended conferences where parents & educators can learn best practices. We've had good teachers who have partnered with us to teach Paul. We've also learned from our son.

Children with Down syndrome have great strengths and ways they tend to learn best that can be utilized effectively in planning programs for them. Each child with Down syndrome is an individual and should be viewed that way, but there are methods that engage children with Down syndrome better. This newsletter is available to provide you with information and resources about how children with Down syndrome learn, facts about Down syndrome, and a way to contact us with questions about your student with Down syndrome.

We hope you find this newsletter helpful. If you would like to continue to receive this newsletter, please e-mail us at deb@dsafnebraska.org.

Warmest Regards,

Deborah Safarik

President of DSAF



Paul Safarik is a 9th grade student at East High School, Lincoln, Nebraska

Every child with Down syndrome . . .

- ☺ . . . is an individual first.
- ☺ . . . is unique and has his/her own strengths and needs.
- ☺ . . . has much to teach all of us about life and learning.

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Down Syndrome—What Is It?

Definition of Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is a condition caused by a chromosomal abnormality. Children with Down syndrome have 47 instead of 46 chromosomes. This extra chromosome causes changes in the development of the brain and body.

Some amount of cognitive deficits are associated with Down syndrome. However, these deficits vary from child to child. Therefore, different children have different learning challenges and different levels of teaching may be required.

Although there are some strategies that may work well for all children with Down syndrome, every teacher should be aware of each child's unique strengths and capabilities, as well as each child's needs.

Because of the range of ability in children with Down syndrome, it is important for families and all members of the school's education team to place few limitations on potential capabilities.

—NICHCY website

2008 CAPITAL CITY BUDDY WALK



The 7th Annual Capital City Buddy Walk will be held Saturday, October 4, 2008, at 8:00 a.m. at Antelope Park (near 30th and A) in Lincoln, Nebraska.

Details and other information available on our website: www.dsafnebraska.org

DSAF provides Book Bundles to schools interested in receiving them. They include the following:

Preschoolers:

Fine Motor Skills for Children with Down Syndrome, Bruni

The New Language of Toys: Teaching Communication Skills to Children with Special Needs, Schwartz

Creating an Inclusive School, Villa

My Friend Isabelle, Woloson

Understanding How Children with Down Syndrome Learn, Peoples

I Can, Can You?, Pitzer

Elementary:

Classroom Language Skills for Children with Down Syndrome, Kumin

Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome, Oelwein

Literacy Skill Development for Students with Special Learning Needs, Broun/Oelwein

Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands On Learners, Horstmeier

Understanding How Children with Down Syndrome Learn, Peoples

Fifth Grade and Up:

Teaching Children with DS about their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality, Couwenhoven

Classroom Language Skills for Children with Down Syndrome, Kumin

Teaching Reading to Children with Down Syndrome, Oelwein

Literacy Skill Development for Students with Special Learning Needs, Broun/Oelwein

Teaching Math to People with Down Syndrome and Other Hands On Learners, Horstmeier

Making Plans: A Financial Guide for People with Down Syndrome and Their Families

Understanding How Children with Down Syndrome Learn, Peoples

For your bundle, contact us at deb@dsafnebraska.org.

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Tips for Teaching Children with Down Syndrome

Children with Down syndrome (CDS) should be taught by considering his/her strengths and needs, rather than "their" syndrome. Many classroom accommodations that work for other learners will also work with CDS.

The following accommodations are not all-inclusive, but are thinking points for you as the teacher. Hopefully, these tips will help you think about the way you teach, the way you arrange the classroom environment, and the way you facilitate communication among your students. These tips will not only help your children with DS but will help other children who struggle in the classroom.

Directions: Always give short directions. Sometimes only one or two words may be enough. Combine verbal instructions with written directions (using pictures if necessary) and/or with visual demonstrations. Some children learn by doing; these children can copy you in an activity. Another strategy is to have a child repeat the directions to you - in this way, you can double-check for comprehension, and the repetition will be another opportunity for the children in the classroom to hear the instructions. Children with auditory processing disorders and language learning difficulties will

benefit from these adaptations as well.

Use a schedule: Visual and/or written schedules divide the school day into workable chunks. They organize the day, prepare a student for transitions, and teach children to predict and plan. Boardmaker by Mayer-Johnson is a very useful tool to prepare schedules. Other schedules can be adapted from the website: www.do2learn.

Topics. Introducing a classroom theme or topic is a perfect time to offer support. Connect skills to real-life situations, as much as is possible. Provide visuals with words to help those children who may not have mastered reading or have difficulty with literacy. Provide organizational strategies (outlines, graphic organizers, maps, etc.) to improve comprehension and understanding of information. (Beginning an activity with an organizer that outlines the What I Know-What I Want Need to Know-What I Learned teaching plan gives focus to a task.) Some other possibilities include: pre-teaching introductory information, pre-teaching vocabulary, teaching highlighter use (or removable highlighter tape), and reducing language levels. For older students, you may wish to have a volunteer or paraprofessional

tape-record written material so students can follow along in assigned readings. Note-takers can also be very helpful (and has the added bonus of increasing social relationships).

Socialization: As the leader of the classroom, you have the perfect opportunity to set the tone for relationships. Children will be watching how you treat them and they will follow your lead. Provide opportunities for group work, especially group work that focuses on team building and a job for each person in the group. Groups should not always be static, but should change over the course of time, to provide students the opportunity to work with different classmates. Facilitate language among students (If you're unsure of the best way to do this, bring your school's speech-language pathologist on board to help you out.).

No doubt, your experiences in the classroom will dictate how you teach. Likewise, it's probable you could add to the tips above. The main point is this: Children with Down syndrome learn much like other learners in your classroom. We encourage you to look at them as individuals who have certain strengths and needs.



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Let Us Hear From YOU!

What can we do to help you in your classroom? What can we offer you to help you feel effective with your student with Down syndrome? DSAF is here to help in any way that we can.

DSAF is an organization of dedicated professionals, family members and caregivers, all interested in the education of children with Down syndrome.

We are very interested in the education of our children with Down syndrome. As an educator, you are at the top of our list! We know teachers have a very

demanding workload and face many challenges in the classroom. So, is there something we can do to make your job more effective? If so, please let us hear from you. We'd like to know that YOU are as interested in our children as we are!

Any questions or comments can be directed to deb@dsafnebraska.org. Deb will make sure that your questions,

comments and/or suggestions are forwarded to the appropriate people.

THANK YOU for seeing that ALL children receive an effective education. We are behind you 100%!

If you would like to continue to receive this newsletter, please e-mail us at deb@dsafnebraska.org

Thanks for caring!
The DSAF of Nebraska

