

Quick Tips for Teaching Students with Down Syndrome in General Education Classes



**Down Syndrome Connection
of the Bay Area**

Down Syndrome Education Alliance

*“Together Encouraging and Inspiring
Unlimited Potential”*

10 Tips for Educating Students with Down Syndrome

1. Know the Definition of Down syndrome.

People with Down syndrome have 47 chromosomes in each cell instead of the typical 46. It is also known as “trisomy 21.”

2. Use people first language.

People first language is putting the person before the disability. Don’t say “Down syndrome girl.” Use the child’s name and if needed, add that she has Down syndrome. The correct term is “Down syndrome,” not “Down’s.” A child does not have Downs.

3. Ensure that the child has access to a communication system.

Many people with Down syndrome do not have adequate expressive verbal skills. In such cases, students benefit from augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems.

4. Pay attention to how you treat the child.

You set the tone for others to follow. Include the student in all facets and routines of the school and classroom. Be respectful and don’t talk down to the the student. Assume competency rather than incompetency.

5. Explain Down syndrome to your students.

Talk to your students about Down syndrome. Do an ability awareness lesson in your classroom. The *Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area* is happy to come to your class and assist with this.

6. Be aware of any health and safety concerns.

Be sure you’re aware of any medical concerns and/or conditions. Find out if the student has any limitations for recess, PE and/or food.

7. Identify how the child learns.

First and foremost, children with Down syndrome CAN learn, but all children learn differently. Figure out how your student learns, what motivates them and what their strengths are. Work with other team members to modify the classwork so that your student can succeed. Ask the *Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area* for input.

8. Partner with the child’s parents.

No one knows your student better than his/her parents. Network and communicate with them regularly. Don’t wait for an IEP meeting.

9. Read your student’s IEP often.

Read the student’s IEP regularly. Make a “Goals at a Glance.” Look for ways to incorporate your student’s goals into daily class routines and activities.

10. Realize that you play a big role in your student’s success!

Create a successful environment for your student. Use strengths, interests and positive feedback as motivators. It is a privilege to play such a vital role in someone’s life!



Down Syndrome Connection
of the Bay Area

10 Tips for Facilitating Communication

1. Wait 10 seconds.

Children with Down syndrome take longer to process information and formulate their response. After a request has been made, allow 10 seconds of wait time before expecting a response. Interrupting the processing time short circuits their thinking and can lead to frustration.

2. Incorporate and encourage total communication.

Throughout all daily activities, use and accept auditory, gestural and visual forms of communication.

3. Model and encourage the use of the student's communication system.

If a student uses an augmentative alternative communication system, ensure that it is incorporated and utilized throughout the daily activities.

4. Have a regular home/school method of communication.

Regular home/school communication increases team trust, student performance and much more.

5. Utilize visual cues and schedules to reinforce information.

Most students with Down syndrome are strong visual learners; capitalize and reinforce with this strength.

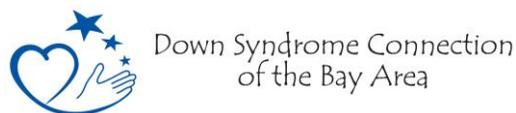
6. Avoid closed questions; encourage more than 1 word utterances.

7. Ensure you are face to face with good eye contact when giving directions.

8. Ask the student to repeat information/instructions back to you.

9. Use simple and familiar language - stay just one step ahead of the student's level.

10. Be aware that student's receptive language skills are more advanced than their expressive language skills.



10 Tips for Facilitating Social Inclusion

1. Make it a priority.

All students learn from their peers. This is especially true of students with Down syndrome. Interactions with typical peers foster appropriate language, social and behavior development. These interactions are equally as important as the academics.

2. Seat students with other students.

It is important to include students with Down syndrome in the general seating charts, not just next to a para-professional.

3. Encourage adults (including paraprofessionals) to give as much physical distance as possible.

4. Ensure that peers understand how to best communicate with the student with Down syndrome.

If the student uses an AAC system, ensure that it's incorporated in the classroom and accessible to peers.

5. Find additional school communities and peer groups.

Encourage your student to participate in an extra-curricular activity, e.g. drama, sports, leadership or clubs.

6. Incorporate activities that require social interactions.

7. Establish a "Circle of Friends," "Lunch Bunch" or "Buddy System."

These are models of inclusion supports that can foster social inclusion. Ask the *Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area* if you want more information about setting up such a group.

8. Create spaces for sharing.

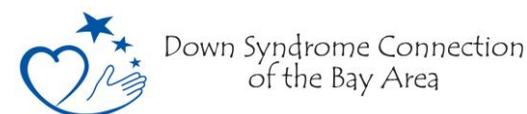
Seek information about all your students; make opportunities for them to express and share information about themselves. This allows for you to build off of interests as well as for students to identify common interests and build personal relationships.

9. Use peers to teach and support.

Peers are often an underutilized resource. Students often listen and learn more when a peer is presenting information or guiding them rather than an adult. This benefits all involved.

10. Discuss Down syndrome (and any difference) in a positive manner.

Down syndrome (or any disability) is not a negative thing and shouldn't be ignored. It is also just one piece of the individual - it doesn't define them. These lessons can be incorporated into an ability awareness presentation.



10 Tips for Including Students in General Education Classes

1. Believe that your student with Down syndrome can succeed in your classroom.

2. Ensure that your student has an effective communication system.

A student cannot succeed and participate if they don't have an effective way to communicate.

3. Have IEP goals that reflect and relate to how the student can participate in the classroom and access the curriculum.

Goals should be linked to participating in a classroom (e.g. raising your hand or initiating an interaction) and the curriculum (e.g. drawing a circle, square and triangle).

4. Ensure that the IEP team works as a team!

The school's administration, special education staff, parents and teacher need to be on the same page, be committed and effective in their collaboration. Know the duties and responsibilities of each team player.

5. Educate your students about Down syndrome and how they can best support their classmate.

The topic of Down syndrome shouldn't be avoided - it's not a negative thing to discuss. Allow students to ask questions and understand how they might be helpful classmates, e.g. not "over-helping" their peer.

6. Round up your supports and resources.

Know how to tap into supports, training and resources. The *Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area* offers a variety of educator resources and trainings.

7. Have a "toolbox" of ways to adapt the curriculum.

You may need to reduce the length of assignments, tie content to a student's interests, allow for peer or adult support, allow for a different means of representation, etc. Having a "toolbox" of appropriate adaptations allows teachers to more easily "modify on the fly."

8. Vary instructional methods.

Differentiate the curriculum; utilize small and whole class lessons, buddy and cross-grade teaching. Reflect diverse learning styles - visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, etc.

9. Know who your student is.

Capitalize on their strengths and interests to build motivation and success.

10. Understand that "Equality" isn't the same as "Equity."

"Equality" means that everyone gets the same thing and is held to the same expectations. "Equity" means that everyone has access to the same opportunities.

Equity is the goal. Don't expect the same results and work load from your student with Down syndrome. Expect them to work to the best of their ability.

10 Tips for Adapting Curriculum

1. Make links to the student's prior knowledge and/or interests.

2. Identify the goal in relation to your student.

Is the goal handwriting, composing a sentence or knowing the main point of a story? Is it to identify different types of rocks or to learn core and topic vocabulary?

3. Know the IEP goals for your student and how to link them into the classroom.

Write a "Goals at a Glance" and refer back to the goals regularly. Take time to think about how you can integrate those goals throughout the curriculum and classroom.

4. Have high (not necessarily equal) expectations.

All students should be working to the best of *their* ability.

5. Use diverse means of representing materials, engaging with materials and responding to materials (UDL).

7. Utilize technology.

Use books on tape, speech generating devices, word processors, picture boards, calculators, applications, etc. to increase engagement and access.

6. Have the student's work be as close as possible (in appearance and topic) as the other students.

This doesn't mean that students will necessarily be doing the same thing, but that things may at least look similar and have parallels.

8. Know the 9 types of frequent curriculum adaptations:

Quantity, Time, Level of Support, Input (way material is delivered), Difficulty, Output (way material is responded to), Participation, Alternate Goals, Substitute Curriculum

9. Differentiate and vary instructional strategies and student groupings.

Differentiation benefits all learners. Utilize small and whole class lessons, buddy and cross-grade teaching. Reflect diverse learning styles - visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, etc.

10. Adapt assessment tools to appropriately gauge desired learning outcomes.