



# An Educator's Guide to Down Syndrome

This guide on Down syndrome is part of a series of briefs that provide basic information about common disabilities, as well as tips for educators as they support children with disabilities.



## Overview

Down syndrome is a genetic condition in which a baby is born with an extra chromosome. Individuals with Down syndrome have an extra full or partial copy of chromosome 21, meaning that they usually have a total of 47 chromosomes instead of the typical 46. This extra chromosome causes delays in the way that a child with Down syndrome develops, including changes in organs and bodily structures that are associated with health concerns.

While children with Down syndrome share some similar physical, cognitive, and behavioral features, each person is unique in their individual characteristics. Some common physical features of Down syndrome include a flat facial profile, an upward slant of the eyes, a single palm crease, and low muscle tone. Babies and children with Down syndrome often experience slower accomplishment of developmental milestones such as walking and talking. The development of cognitive, language, social, and other skills may also be delayed.

Babies and children with Down syndrome respond well to early intervention and individualized learning opportunities planned by a team of educators and therapists. Individuals with Down syndrome have an increased risk for medical and health concerns such as heart defects, vision, and hearing loss. As with the general population, these concerns can be treated, and individuals should receive regular health care and screening.

Down syndrome is most often diagnosed through medical testing during pregnancy. If Down syndrome is not tested for during pregnancy, it can be effectively diagnosed at birth or shortly after. Such early diagnosis provides a good opportunity for early intervention services to begin at birth.

## Support Strategies

Educators can implement a variety of strategies to support a positive experience for children with Down syndrome in their learning environment:

- Include the child in family, early care and education, and community programs and opportunities.
- If the child already has an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Program (IEP), attend the regular team meetings.
- Learn about and use research-based intervention strategies and approaches.
- Communicate with the family about any known medical conditions or behavioral concerns. Be a member of the child's team and carry out support plans.
- Be aware of and make referrals in light of any new medical or behavioral concerns that may arise. Pay attention to and regularly screen the child's vision and hearing.
- Use positive behavior support practices to promote the child's social and emotional development and address behavioral concerns.



- Seek out local family and caregiver resources and advocacy organizations that specialize in the care and education of children with Down syndrome.
- Obtain the appropriate permissions needed before administering any medications to the child.

### Helpful Resources

- [Centers For Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\) – Down Syndrome](#)
- [Children’s Hospital Boston – Behavior and Down Syndrome: A Practical Guide for Parents](#)
- [National Association for Down Syndrome](#)
- [National Down Syndrome Society \(NDSS\) – Down Syndrome](#)
- [National Down Syndrome Society \(NDSS\) – Early Intervention](#)