

Understanding Aspects of SEND: Down Syndrome

1. What is Down Syndrome? Down Syndrome is a genetic condition that occurs when a person has an extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material affects physical development, learning abilities and health. It is a naturally occurring chromosomal difference. Individuals with Down Syndrome have unique personalities, talents and abilities, and with the right support, they can thrive in many areas of life. While it can be associated with certain health conditions, many individuals live fulfilling and active lives. In the UK, one in every 1000 babies are born with Down Syndrome. (contact.org)

2. How can Down Syndrome present? The characteristics of Down Syndrome vary from person to person, but common features include:

- **Physical characteristics:** Low muscle tone (hypotonia), a flat facial profile, almond-shaped eyes and a single crease across the palm.
- **Developmental delays:** Slower progress in reaching motor milestones such as crawling, walking and speaking.
- **Learning difficulties:** Challenges with memory, processing speed and problem-solving, which may affect academic learning.
- **Speech and language delay:** Difficulty with clear speech and language development, often requiring additional support.
- **Social strengths:** Many individuals with Down Syndrome are highly social, empathetic and enjoy interactions with others.
- **Health conditions:** Higher likelihood of medical issues such as heart conditions, hearing loss, vision problems or thyroid disorders.

3. Ways to Help Manage Down Syndrome Support for individuals with Down Syndrome focuses on building independence, nurturing strengths and addressing specific needs. Key approaches include:

- **Early intervention programs:** Speech therapy, physiotherapy and occupational therapy can support development in key areas.
- **Provide structured learning:** Use over learning, repetition, visual aids and hands-on activities to support understanding and retention.
- **Support communication:** Encourage the use of sign language, visual prompts and assistive tools to aid speech and language development.

- **Promote physical development:** Activities like swimming, dancing and play-based exercises can help strengthen muscles and improve coordination.
- **Encourage social skills:** Facilitate group activities, peer interactions and inclusive opportunities to build friendships and confidence.

4. Where to Find Out More

- **Down Syndrome Association** (www.downs-syndrome.org.uk): Provides resources, advice, and support for individuals with Down Syndrome and their families.
- **National Down Syndrome Society** (www.ndss.org): Offers education, advocacy and practical guidance for individuals with Down Syndrome.
- **Down Syndrome Education International** (www.dseinternational.org): Focuses on improving education and development for individuals with Down Syndrome.
- Book recommendations:
[*Early Communication Skills for Children with Down Syndrome* by Libby Kumin](#)
[*Babies with Down Syndrome* by Susan Skallerup](#)