

DOWN SYNDROME.

Down Syndrome was so called as it was named after J L H Down 1828-96 an English Physician who studied the disorder.

It is a genetic disorder and the people affected have an extra chromosome a normal person has 22 matching pairs Down's have 23.

Intellectual disability is a symptom of Down's the degree of this disability varies person to person. They may also have other conditions such as

Poor hearing

Poor sight

Poor short term memory

All of which can contribute to problems with communication skills. They may also have some physical conditions such as heart defects, also an instability of the atlas/axis vertebral joint

Although there are common speech and language problems – there is no single pattern of speech and language common to all people with Down's Syndrome. There are however speech and language challenges for most .

Many have more difficulty with expressive language than they do with understanding speech and language – receptive language skills are usually more advanced than expressive language skills. Some can have quite a good and varied vocabulary but very little grammar..

Sequencing of sounds and words may be difficult for some and many have problems with intelligibility of their speech and articulation – sometimes they may have a thickened or enlarged tongue which contributes to this problem. Some may have fluency problems – some will use just short phrases while others can have long conversations.

All of the speech and language problems that children with Down's demonstrate are faced by other children as well, there are no speech and language problems that are totally unique to them.

As there is often a delay in language development, sign language may be used alongside speech as a means of communication to begin with. Young Downs children by the age of 8 months to 1yr. Have a great deal to communicate with the people around them. If they do not have some way of

communicating their messages young children become very frustrated by their inability to be understood. So a transitional communication system is very important until the child is neurophysiologically able to speak. Although speech is the most difficult communication system with Down's more than 95% will choose to use speech as their primary method of communication. Total communication – which is the use of sign language + speech is frequently used until the child is ready for the transition into speech. Research has shown that children with Down's will discontinue using the sign when they can say the word so that it is understandable to those around them. Signing alongside speech may continue into adulthood when there is an accompanying hearing or articulation problem as a back up to speech. This can apply to many other people with learning difficulties.

Most children with Down's are able to understand messages and are able to produce language – through signs – well before they are able to produce speech.

Many children with Down's will learn to read effectively.

So when communicating with people with Down's it is important to use clear precise language – key words – give them plenty of time to process language – use signs if necessary to reinforce speech. Also be aware that they may have understood more than you think but just cannot find the right words to give a comprehensive reply.

Much of this information about Down's Syndrome can apply in one way or another to many forms of learning disabilities as many will have some form of difficulty with processing language and communication skills.

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A few extra notes:- Intellectual disability is a symptom of Down Syndrome but the degree varies a great deal between individuals.

There may be other conditions present such as poor hearing poor sight poor short term memory & congenital heart problems which will also affect their learning capabilities

If they have got poor short term memory always check when you have asked them to do something that they have understood what you are expecting them to do.

Many of them are overweight so be careful that you do not overstress them physically.

They usually love music & rhythm & so you can include these in your lessons it will help to counteract anxiety.

They do not hide their emotions. Many will be quite gregarious but they all tend to suffer from high levels of stress & apprehension.

Mounting a pony can often take a great deal of mental effort requiring a lot of heavy breathing & the plucking up of courage so don't rush them.

There are a lot of unmounted activities that they can enjoy helping with.