

Special Educational Needs Inclusion Service
Down syndrome

Supporting Positive Behaviour



- Behaviour problems are not an inevitable feature associated with Down syndrome; most children with Down syndrome are capable of behaving in an age-appropriate way.
- Have HIGH expectations of your child, and expect them to behave well.
- Reward positive behaviour!



Why do some children with Down syndrome display inappropriate behaviours?

Impulsiveness: Often children with Down syndrome have difficulty understanding when “enough is enough”. They may have difficulty understanding the “stop” signs provided by others.

Social attention



Difficulty relating effectively to others: Though children with Down syndrome are often affectionate and enjoy socialising, they can have difficulty understanding how to effectively interact with others. This can be really upsetting for the child and therefore they may display inappropriate behaviour.

Sensory



Difficulty communicating: Children with Down syndrome typically have a speech and language delay which will impact the way in which they can communicate with those around them. Understandably this barrier can be very frustrating and can lead to displays of inappropriate behaviour.

Getting things



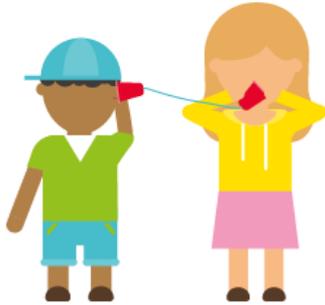
Escape/avoidance



Express emotion



Identify Causes of Negative Behaviours



Your child's behaviour is often a way of them trying to communicate with others around them. There is a wide range of things they may be attempting to communicate to you such as frustration, tiredness, physical pain or that they want your attention. Remembering that they are trying to communicate something can make it easier to deal with difficult behaviour.

If your child is displaying a negative behaviour, which needs to be changed, it is important to try and work out *why* they are behaving that way.

Behaviour is a form of communication. Negative behaviours may be:

- Attention seeking
- To get out of doing something
- Requesting something
- A sensory need/overload
- Expressing anxiety
- Communicating emotion or pain



One way to begin to understand what your child is trying to communicate is by keeping a behaviour diary. Keep a note of when and where your child exhibits the challenging behaviour, what happened beforehand and what the consequence of this behaviour was. Patterns of negative behaviour may help you to understand how to begin to tackle the problem.

Look to the future

Day to day handling of inappropriate behaviour can be a daily challenge. However, keep your eye on the long term goals. The effort and consistency with behaviour today will have long term impacts for the future such as increasing independent living skills and building social skills. Keeping focussed on the future can really help with getting through the frustrations of today.



Ideas to try at home



Have High Expectations

Having high expectations of your child and expecting them to behave in an age appropriate way will encourage good behaviour.

Some examples of behaviour that would be expected from primary aged children could include:

- Sitting at the table during dinner (perhaps for a shorter time at first);
- Putting rubbish in the bin;
- Tidying up their toys (depending on age, perhaps with a little help);
- Showing kind hands and feet when playing with others;
- Being able to share and take turns (with a little help).



Every child is different but keeping those behavioural expectations high will really help in promoting lots of positive behaviours.

Model Good Behaviour

Children with Down syndrome will often imitate the behaviour of those around them. Therefore it is important to be a good role model for your child and demonstrate the behaviour you expect from them.

Top Tip: Use imaginative play as a good time to model desired behaviours.

Have a “tea party” and display lots of good behaviours such as good sitting and saying please and thank you.



Developing Social Skills

Try to ensure that your child has plenty of opportunities to socialise and play with peers. This may be through family connections, friends or local groups and activities. Your child should be encouraged to share toys and take turns. Most repetitive play activities can be used to teach turn-taking.

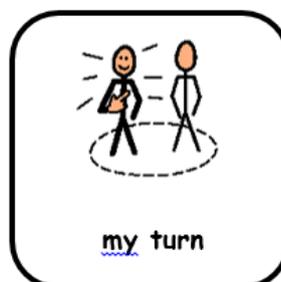
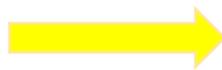
Suggestions for turn-taking activities:

- Build a jigsaw together
- Build a tower from bricks
- Putting shapes in a shape sorter
- Playing a musical instrument
- Giant snakes and ladders
- Ball games



Use the language 'Your turn!' and 'My turn!' If necessary, you can use a turn-taking visual to reinforce this concept.

You can personalise the 'my turn' card with a photo of your child.



Pick a social skill you would like to teach your child (e.g. taking turns, sharing, manners, greetings, recognising feelings in self and others). Then follow these steps

1. Tell them why this skill is important.
2. Break the skill down into easy small steps.
3. Show them the skill in action.
4. Practice the skill in the safety of your own home.
5. Give your child positive feedback and praise; correct them gently if necessary.
6. Launch! Practice the skill in public.



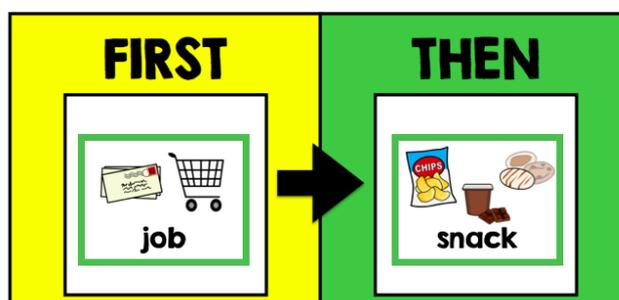
Set Boundaries

Give your child clear routines e.g. in the morning, at mealtimes and at bedtime.

Routines are important because they can:

- Give children security
- Teach children self-discipline
- Eliminate power struggles
- Help children to understand concepts and language of time
- Help children to understand what is expected of them
- Help parents to maintain consistency in expectations

Children with Down syndrome are *strong visual learners*, so visuals are often helpful for children to learn a routine. Please bear in mind that lots of visual routines, such as the examples below, can be found online. However, children usually respond much better to a *personalised* visual routine, using photographs of them in their own surroundings. This is much more meaningful.



Children are often asked to use a First/Then visual schedule within their school and this will sometimes be used as a motivational tool. Implementing a first and then board at home can be a good motivational tool for tasks which your child is reluctant to complete, for example: *First* finish your dinner, *Then* outside to play.

Supporting Good Communication



Providing your child with simple clear instructions will help to overcome a range of speech and communication difficulties. Keep instructions simple. Direction should be very specific and be directive; don't make it a request.

For example;

Don't say "Can you go and get your school bag or we are all going to end up late for school?"

Do say "Please get your school bag now"

Don't say "I have already told you twice to go and put on your shoes; if you go and put on your shoes now then we will be able to go out for a walk to the park".

Do say "Please put on your shoes now"

As children will often try to communicate through their behaviour, offering your child alternate ways to communicate can lead to a reduction in frustration motivated behaviours.



A social story is a small booklet or app with visual cues which tells children what to expect in a particular situation. You may outline clearly how you expect your child to behave. Again, photographs are usually best.

Contact your child's speech and language therapist to discuss individual ways to promote effective communication with your child.



Rewarding Positive Behaviour



Praise

All children will engage in behaviour they know they will be rewarded for. It is important not to give lots of attention to challenging behaviour while good behaviour goes unrewarded.

Take the time to plan in advance which behaviour you want to see more of and ensure to offer immediate rewards – **be consistent!**

How to offer praise:

- Use specific language (“**Wow! You put your coat on!**” not “**Good job!**”)
- Children need to know exactly what it was that they did right so that they can do it again in the future
- Use an enthusiastic/upbeat tone of voice
- Smile!
- Couple with non-verbal praise (fist bumps, high 5s, clapping)

Suggestions for non-verbal praise:



High Five



Smile



Wink



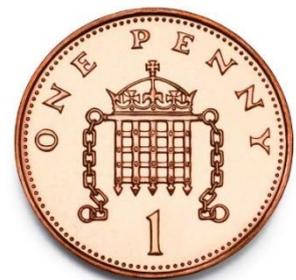
Thumbs Up



Fist Bump

Top Tip: Offer a high level of praise to your child.

Research indicates that the ratio of praise to correction should be five praises to every one correction. Keep some pennies in your pocket; every time you praise your child move one penny to the other pocket. See how much praise you can give your child in one day.



Reward Charts



For young children, rewards need to be **immediate**, so that they understand it is linked to the positive behaviour they have just demonstrated. Simple reward charts can be used as your child gets older.

A reward chart which is supported by visuals will get the best results. Use pictures of your child engaging in the desired behaviour, such as doing their homework or getting dressed for bed. It's important to have the chart displayed in an area where the child can see it clearly such as on the refrigerator.

When you first devise the chart and set goals, don't make it too complicated or make the tasks too difficult; it's important that the child becomes engaged and invested and children respond best to **positivity**. Pick one or two goals that you know your child will be able to complete (with a little help if required) so that your child will keep trying. As your child becomes more independent with the set tasks and is consistently achieving their rewards, add in some more difficult tasks – it's really important to **go slow and keep it simple!**

		Star Chart						
Activity		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
 brush my teeth		★						
 eat my food		★	★					
 make my bed		★	★					
 say please and thank you		★	★					
 brush my hair			★					
 finish my reading		★						

Top Tip: The key to success is to be consistent with the reward chart.

- **Only** give rewards when deserved
- **Always** give rewards when deserved
- **Don't** forget about the reward chart when things are going well
- **Don't** give up on the reward chart when things are not going so well!



Celebrate Success

Try celebrating your child's achievements and positive behaviour by making an 'I can' book. Stick in pictures and write notes about what they can do.

For example:

- I can help to brush my teeth
- I can share a game with my sister
- I can climb the step by myself
- I can sign "thank you"
- I can help mummy bring in the shopping
- I can hold daddy's hand and do good walking



Read the 'I can' book regularly with your child and try to add to it regularly. Try to think particularly about celebrating good behaviour.

Offer choices

It's not unusual for parents to get into a power struggle with their children, with the child wanting one thing and the parent wanting another. Consider the following if you get into a power struggle with your child:

- Like everyone, your child needs some control over their life.
- Children tend to work better with people who listen to them and who can be flexible.
- When children are offered an element of choice within a situation they are more likely to become invested and engaged.

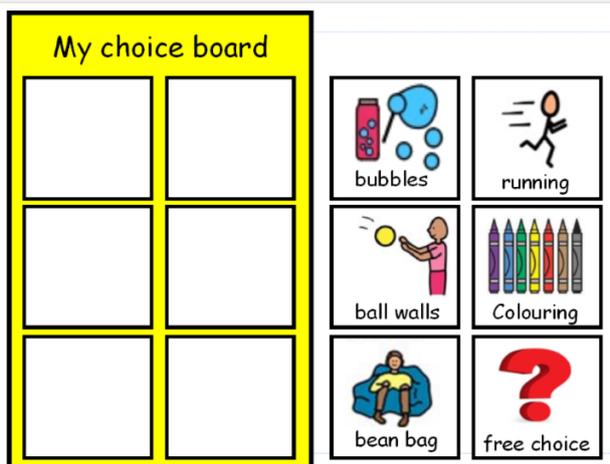
Offering choices in the daily routines can:

- Build respect;
- Increase cooperation;
- Develop problem-solving skills;
- Meet the child's need for power and control.



Try some of the following ideas in order to offer your child control over situations:

- If a child has three tasks which they are expected to do, allow them to choose what order they complete them in.
- **First and then** – explain to your child what they need to do first, but let them decide what they will do next.
- Offer a choice of two items of clothing before asking them to get dressed.
- Let them choose which book they would like to read before bed.
- Ask if they would like to use crayons or paint to draw a picture.
- Ask which teddy they would like to bring to bed.



Top Tip: Only offer choices that you can agree to!

Don't ask "Is it time for bed?" because this is not a choice.

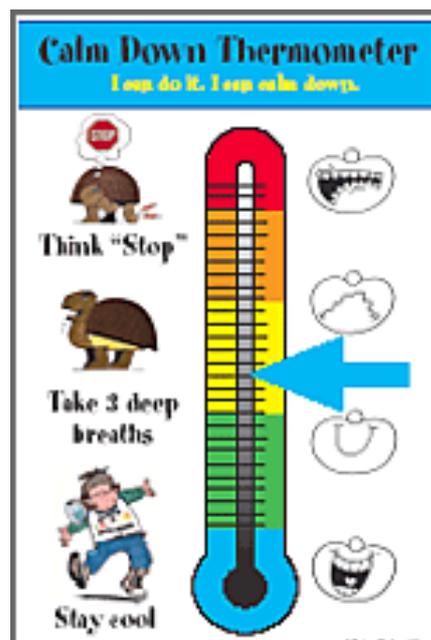
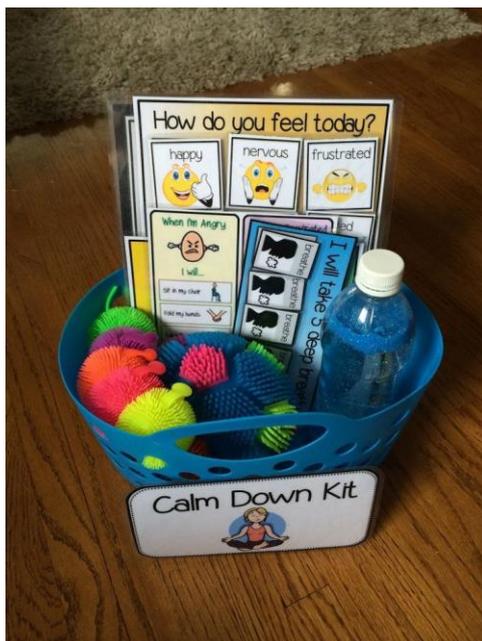
What if your child says, "No! I want to play!"

There are times when choices should not be offered; only offer choices when the child has a choice to make.

Do ask "Who would you like to put you to bed? Mummy or Daddy?"

Calm Down Strategy

Try to teach your child about ways to calm down when they feel angry or frustrated. This might mean teaching them to go to a safe space, take deep breaths, cuddle a teddy or use some calm down toys. You might use a teddy or a puppet to demonstrate and practice a calm down strategy while your child is calm.



Public/Private Behaviour

Children with Down syndrome sometimes struggle to understand the difference between public and private behaviour. They will need to be explicitly taught the difference between the two, and it's good to start this from an early age. Tell your child exactly what kind of behaviour and body parts are private. Make some privacy rules (e.g. shut the door when you are using the bathroom, knock on the bedroom door before you go in) and make sure everyone in the house sticks to them.

Other Peoples' Expectations

You may find that other people have different expectations than you regarding your child's behaviour. If other people are caring for your child (family, childminder, day care etc.), ensure that you discuss your expectations with them. Provide them with any strategies you have found to be helpful to manage behaviour.



Ignoring and Redirecting

Sometimes your child will act in certain ways to gain attention. One useful strategy that might be helpful is **Planned Ignoring**.

Behaviours which are harmful to the child, others or property should **NEVER** be ignored.

Ignore

- Ignore the behaviour, not the child
- Continue with what you are doing
- No consequences for the behaviour

Redirect

- Your message is "do this instead"
- Offer a distraction
- Use gestures to redirect focus to task

Reward

- Offer praise and attention as soon as the child makes any attempt at desired behaviour

Below is an example of implementing Planned Ignoring in a daily situation.

Sam is hiding under the dinner table and won't come up to eat with the family.

Persevere!

You may find that the behaviour increases before it decreases as your child will expect the behaviour to gain your attention and when it doesn't they may increase the behaviour.

When they continue to see the behaviour doesn't gain attention the behaviours should decrease.

Ignore

- Don't try to verbally negotiate with Sam
- Everyone continue with dinner
- Don't reprimand him for being under the table

Redirect

- Putting a hand out towards Sam to encourage him to join the family
- "Sam please go get teddy so he can have some dinner too"
- Give praise to others for good sitting and eating

Reward

- When Sam makes any attempt to come out from under the table give lots of immediate praise and reward

Before you go...

General Top Tips:

- Stay Calm
- Notice and praise positive behaviour
- Ignore negative behaviour where appropriate
- Use distraction/redirection
- Be consistent
- Separate immature behaviour from deliberate challenging behaviour
- If you are getting stressed or frustrated take a break/change person dealing with the behaviour (if possible)
- Smile and be enthusiastic
- Make eye contact
- Get down to the child's level, or equal level for an adult
- Do not shout
- Be clear and use simple words



Final Thoughts

Pick your battles! Children (and adults) won't always do what we want them to, it can be beneficial to stand back and consider if a behaviour is worth reacting to.

Consider the following;

- Is the behaviour dangerous? If so you must intervene. If not and it's not one of the behaviours you are targeting to change then it might be worth letting it go... for now.
- If the behaviour is low level and just bothersome, it might be worth ignoring and you might find when these behaviours are not gaining attention they may go away on their own.

