AN INTRODUCTION TO DOWN SYNDROME
DOWN SYNDROME INCLUSION SUPPORT SERVICE

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NAME THE PERSON FIRST, NOT THEIR DISABILITY……

• Use phrases like,
• “a person who has Down syndrome”
• “a person with Down syndrome”
ESSENTIAL INFORMATION ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME
• One in every 800 live births will be a child with Down syndrome

• In Victoria, between 45 and 60 babies with Down syndrome are born each year
• Chromosomal anomaly resulting in an extra copy chromosome 21

• The genetic material on the extra chromosome causes the characteristics associated with the syndrome
Down syndrome affects children born to mothers of any age, race or economic status.
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

• Down syndrome is one of the most common causes of intellectual disability. All children with Down syndrome will have a degree of intellectual disability.
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

**Impaired immune system**
- Susceptibility to upper respiratory infections
- Terrible sleepers

**Heart defects**
- May require surgery at birth and ongoing monitoring
- May tire easily
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

Hearing difficulties
- May be susceptible to glue ear—may have grommets
- May have varying degrees of hearing loss
- May wear aids
- May have inconsistent level of hearing
- May cause delay in language development
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

Vision difficulties

- May have a reduced ability to see fine detail
- May have difficulty focusing
- May wear glasses
- May have difficulty adjusting to changes in light/depth
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS - medical and physical

Sensory processing difficulties

• May have difficulty processing sensory input
• May result in sensory-seeking or avoidant behaviour
• Can affect the five traditional senses as well as balance and movement and their body position, movement of muscles and joints
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

Physical characteristics
- Shorter stature and limbs
- Smaller hands and fingers
- Almond shaped eyes
- Flat face profile

Motor development
- Poor muscle tone
- Milestones may be delayed
- May have difficulties with coordination and gait
- May be floppy and loose jointed
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

**Atlanto-axial instability**
Possible instability of the joint at the base of the neck (possible need for advice before participating in gymnastics or trampolining)
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

Fine Motor
• May have manipulation difficulties
• May have poor dexterity (trouble doing up buttons, tying shoelaces etc.)
• May have difficulty with drawing, scissor skills etc.
COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
- medical and physical

Speech difficulties

• Due to anatomical differences (smaller jaw and large tongue compared to size of mouth) some may experience speech motor difficulties

• Hearing impairments may impact development of clear speech
COMMUNICATION

Speech

• Receptive language is more developed than expressive language

• May use limited expressive language

• Language may not be as sophisticated as peers
COMMUNICATION

• Poor short term memory means that they have trouble retaining instructions

• May have poor listening skills
COMMUNICATION

- May become frustrated by an inability to communicate… may be unintelligible

- May be non-verbal, relying on gestures, signing and pictures instead of words
“SELF - TALK”

- Assists with processing information
  - Allows for practice
  - Is effective for debriefing
  - Is an appropriate way to vent emotions of anger, frustration, amusement
  - Can be a way of combatting isolation and loneliness
ESSENTIAL TRUTHS WHICH ARE COMMON TO ALL CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

- People with Down syndrome do not all look alike
- People with Down syndrome experience a full range of emotions
ESSENTIAL TRUTHS WHICH ARE COMMON TO ALL CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

- People with Down syndrome will keep learning new skills throughout their lives

- People with Down syndrome have a broad range of skills
ESSENTIAL TRUTHS WHICH ARE COMMON TO ALL CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

• All people have their own individuality and personalities

• Most people with Down syndrome will learn to read and write
ESSENTIAL TRUTHS WHICH ARE COMMON TO ALL CHILDREN WITH DOWN SYNDROME

• Families that have a child with Down syndrome are just like other families
The parents of a child with Down syndrome want to find the right place for their child to be, a place where he is welcomed, accepted, known, accommodated and challenged. A place where he belongs.
Inclusion in the mainstream setting

....a short video

"Communities that include everyone become stronger and everyone wins"

- Jane Imbody
THE CHILD WITH DOWN SYNDROME AS A LEARNER
THEY DO HAVE STRENGTHS!

- Visual processing is a strength
- Understand considerably more than their verbal abilities might suggest
- Can have amazing memories
- Enjoy books and being read to
GO WITH THE STRENGTHS!

• For many, social understanding, sensitivity and interaction comes naturally
• Generally adhere to the same behavioural and social norms as their peers
• Lifelong learners
• Responsive to praise and affirmation
CHALLENGES

• For most, there is a delay in all areas of skill development

• It is more difficult to learn

• It takes longer to process, learn and complete tasks
CHALLENGES

- Working memory is generally poor
- Poor auditory processing and memory
- Speech and language is very under-developed
- Struggle with abstract concepts (eg. Number)
CHALLENGES

• Medical and physical characteristics can impede learning

• Social and communication skills will impede learning
ANY CHILD WILL LEARN......

• We just have to find the right way to teach him........
REFERENCES

- Resources presented at Teaching Students with Down Syndrome workshop can be found on our website
  see link: