Why Do I Need This Information?

This is an exciting time! Society is beginning to realize that most children with Down syndrome learn better when taught alongside typically developing kids.

Including children with disabilities in regular education classes, with appropriate classroom supports, enriches the learning experience for ALL children.

> **But kids have questions.**
> **Parents have questions.**

For parents, "those" kids weren't in our classes when we were in school, so we don't have much information about their unique gifts and challenges.

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is something that causes differences in the way a person looks and learns. No two people with Down syndrome are quite the same, but they are often extra flexible in their joints, have eyes that slant, have small ears and a small nose and grow more slowly than other kids. People with Down syndrome also tend to learn more slowly than others.

Why is it called Down syndrome?

A doctor named John Landon Down was the first person to write about this condition. It's not called Down syndrome because we should be "down" or depressed about it.

Why do people have Down syndrome?

People with Down syndrome are born with one extra chromosome in some or all of their cells. Chromosomes contain the directions that tell your body how to grow. These directions tell your body what color your eyes and hair will be, how big your nose will be, whether you will be a good singer, and many other things. When a person has an extra chromosome, it mixes up their body's directions a little. That is why people with Down syndrome look a little different and have to try harder to learn. Nobody knows why some babies are born with Down syndrome, but we do know that it is nobody's fault.

Will Down syndrome go away?

No. Down syndrome is not a sickness. Most people with Down syndrome are very healthy, although nearly fifty percent are born with heart defects, most of which are corrected by surgery.

You cannot "catch" Down syndrome. The only way to get Down syndrome is to be born with it.

Why can't my friend with Down syndrome talk very well?

Many people with Down syndrome have trouble learning to talk. Many little kids first learn to communicate by using their hands in sign language. Kids with Down syndrome also benefit from having a teacher help them learn to talk (a speech and language pathologist), but the best teachers are often other kids.

If you know a person with Down syndrome and you don't understand them, ask them to repeat themselves or show you what they mean. Just because a person with Down syndrome doesn't talk to you doesn't mean they don't want to be your friend. They may just need extra time and extra help.

Can people with Down syndrome learn?

Yes! People with Down syndrome can and do learn, but have to work much harder than others, and may need more time and extra help. Kids with Down syndrome can participate in all school activities even though they may not learn everything.

Do people with Down syndrome grow up?

Yes. In adulthood, many people with Down syndrome have jobs, go to college, live independently and support their communities. People with Down syndrome bring to their jobs enthusiasm, reliability and dedication.

Do people who have Down syndrome have feelings?

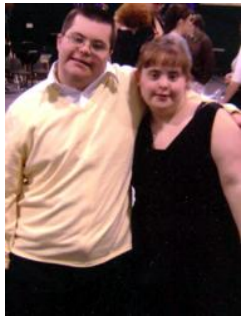
Yes. Just like everyone, people with Down syndrome have feelings. They can feel happy, silly, sad, sorry or upset, just like you. People with Down syndrome enjoy friends and family and can be hurt when someone teases or makes fun of them – just like you.

Why does my friend with Down syndrome act differently than other kids?

People with Down syndrome have difficulty with language and talking. Many kids want to interact and play with their friends, but don't know how, are afraid they won't be understood, or afraid that they will be told, "No, you can't play." Some kids with Down syndrome get overwhelmed when too many things are going on at the same time.

Can I help my friend?

Yes! Play and talk with people with Down syndrome. If they're having trouble playing a game, give them time and extra help, or ask what game they want to play. Find out what your friend likes to do. Hang out together. You are much more alike than different!



Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan
Possibility. Promise. Potential.

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Resources:

Stuve-Bodeen, *We'll Paint the Octopus Red*

NDSC *Fact Sheet*

ARC *Fact Sheet by Siegfried M. Pueschel, MD*

NDSS *Down Syndrome Myths and Truths*

UPS FOR DOWNS

United Parent Support for Down Syndrome

UPS for DownS is a volunteer organization of parents of children with Down syndrome based in the northwest suburbs of Chicago with members all over the Chicagoland area. For more information about UPS for DownS call 847-705-0715

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SIMPLE ANSWERS TO KIDS' (not so simple) QUESTIONS ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME

Information to Encourage Friendships

"Thinking with your heart is how a friendship starts."
-- *Winnie the Pooh*
A.A. Milne

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