

# Fostering Independence in Students with Down Syndrome



Presented By,



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# Goals for this presentation



- DREAM BIG!
- Presume competence
- Get out of the way
- Self regulation
- Think like an employer
- Work yourself out of a job



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## Down Syndrome 101



- Most commonly occurring genetic condition resulting in 1:800 births
- Down Syndrome is prevalent in all races, socioeconomic classes and shows no gender bias
- There are over 250,000 individuals are living with Down syndrome in the United States
- No known cause or cure for Down syndrome-it's a random occurrence in cell division when a baby is forming in the womb



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## Down Syndrome 101



- 80 percent of babies with Down syndrome are born to women under the age of 35
- Average life span if born with Down syndrome today: 55-60 years of age
- Varied mental abilities, physical development, behavior, and accomplishments



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## Possible Communication Issues

- Receptive vs. Expressive language
- Hearing
- Short term memory
- Speech articulation
- Processing time
- Generalization



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## Communication Strategies

- Demands and Interruptions
  - Necessary vs. Unnecessary Demands
  - Talking too fast and too much information
  - 10 seconds can change a life
  - Visual interruptions
- Fallouts of Needless Demands and Interruptions
  - Shut Down-Down syndrome drop
  - Aggressive or Uncooperative Behavior



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## How does your child/student view you?

- My friend?
- My personal assistant?
- My shadow?
- My boss?
- Supporting the way you would want to be supported?



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## Potential Effects of Too Much Support

- Separation from classmates
- Interference with peers
- Feeling of being stigmatized
- Lack of teacher engagement
- Loss of personal control
- Provocation of behaviors



\*\*Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli and MacFarland (1997)



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## You're overthinking it!



- Common behavior for age
- Typical kids do this
- Too much supervision
- Too many prompts/transitions
- Over verbalizing
- Separate is not equal



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## You're under thinking it!



- Behavior is communication!  
\*\*respond don't react\*\*
- You have to teach behavior
- Accommodations/modifications
- Scheduling
- Low expectations
- Avoid the readiness myth



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## Successful supervising adults

- Confident in their actions
- Feel no guilt over the disability
- Look into the future
- Allow student to try and fail
- Natural consequences
- Avoid power struggles
- Are process oriented vs goal oriented



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## Successful supervising adults

- Are consistent in interactions
  - expectations
  - tone of voice
  - routines
- Are not guided by a clock
- Measure success by level of independence achieved by student
- **BELIEVE IN THE STUDENT!!**



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## Help me stay on task



- Predictability
- Tasks uninterrupted
- Transition times for peers
- Prompts for unstructured time
- Reducing verbal demands
- Why is this important to me
- Avoid unnecessary interruptions
- Visual schedules



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## Help me stay on task



- Watch and wait
- Prompt hierarchy
- Backward chaining
- Ask facilitative questions (what comes next?)
- Use transition objects (headphones to noisy settings)
- Break big tasks down
- Don't interrupt with praise



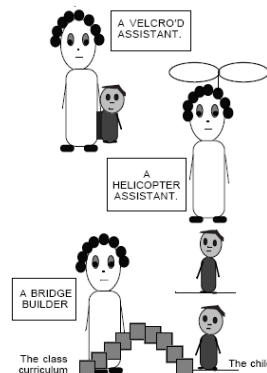
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## The Role of Professionals

- Encourage cooperative learning and involvement of peers as good role models
- Act as a bridge between student and the curriculum
- Provide feedback to the classroom teacher on the student's response to the curriculum
- Encourage development of age appropriate behavior
- Set high expectations and refuse to accept inappropriate behavior

WHAT SORT OF LEARNING SUPPORT ASSISTANT?



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## Avoiding Learned Helplessness

### Promotes Learned Helplessness

- Protecting student from taking risks
- Rescuing student from anticipated outcomes
- Overlooking errors
- Constant prompts
- Speaking for your student
- Giving inflated grades
- Permitting bad behavior
- Making excuses
- Interceding before they ask for help
- Inconsistency in discipline/expectations

### Promotes Independence

- Setting clear limits on what is safe
- Discussing issues and creating solutions
- Giving clear directions/expect follow through
- Student encouraged to speak for self
- Teaching at a challenging level using learning strengths
- Using rubric scoring honestly
- Coaching student on errors
- Consistency in discipline/expectations
- Holding student accountable for actions
- Allowing student to fail in safe environment
- Teaching student to ask for help as needed



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## How to Fade Support



- When is support truly necessary
  - 10 minutes at recess lineup
  - All day long
- Reduce cues
- Look for natural supports
- WILL vs SKILL
- Ensure materials student works on promote independence



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## Skill vs. Will



Teach skills  
Provide structure  
Visual supports  
Pacing

Teach behavior  
Coping strategies  
Consequences  
Wait it out when possible



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## Reinforcement Schedule



- Prompt dependency
- Praise dependency
- Reward dependency



**\*\*intermittent reinforcement is the best way to shape behavior\*\***



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## Mother Hens



- Awesome
- Annoying
- Resentment
- Aggression
- Shutdown
- Enabling



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# The Power of Peer Presentations



- Helps other students understand what it is like to live with Down syndrome
- Provides students with strategies for supporting their friend with Down syndrome
- Opens the door for an important conversation
- Teaches diversity and tolerance
- Facilitates friendships



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# Questions???



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