



# Lots of Socks for Down syndrome



**Down syndrome awareness  
and inclusion resource**



**Down Syndrome  
Australia**

Every student grows through quality education and an inclusive environment – in their community, at school and at home. All students benefit from care and attention from their teachers and peers. Students with Down syndrome are no different. By creating an atmosphere of diversity, children are less likely to develop bias towards peers who seem different from them.

This resource addresses children's natural curiosity about difference and Down syndrome.

Lots of Socks Day helps children respectfully understand the diversity in their world. The resource aims to help children learn about, accept and celebrate each person's uniqueness.

## **When is World Down Syndrome Day?**

The United Nations General Assembly decided that from 2012, World Down Syndrome Day would be celebrated on the 21st day of the 3rd month, to signify the uniqueness of the triplication (trisomy) of the 21st chromosome which causes Down syndrome. Organisations around the world are invited to observe World Down Syndrome Day in an appropriate way, to raise awareness of Down syndrome.

## **Why Lots of Socks?**

Lots of Socks is a Down Syndrome International campaign to create conversation and bring awareness of Down syndrome on 21 March, World Down Syndrome Day, each year. The idea behind the Lots of Socks initiative is that all types, shapes and sizes of the same thing can be unique in their own way, and yet do the same thing. Everyone understands what socks are, how they look and what they are for, and that no two socks are the same.

Lots of Socks is a campaign to create conversation about diversity, uniqueness, inclusion and acceptance.



# Down syndrome awareness and inclusion resource

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## Objective

This resource aims to raise Down syndrome awareness in primary schools and support the social and educational inclusion of children with Down syndrome in their school community. You can use this resource in various ways:

- Inviting children to wear their choice of socks to school on that day – they can be bright, colourful, short or long; the choice is endless.
- Including a gold coin donation to raise funds for your local Down syndrome association or Down Syndrome Australia.



[www.downsyndrome.org.au/get-involved/donate/](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/get-involved/donate/)

- Using the resources to have a conversation about inclusion or Down syndrome.
- Using the resources for a creative writing or drawing exercise about diversity.

## Definitions

The definitions and explanations provided are written for primary school children aged five and above.

### Chromosome:

Inside the cells of all living things are microscopic, thread-like parts called chromosomes. They carry hereditary information from one generation to the next in the form of genes. Chromosomes determine traits such as the colour of your hair, the colour of your eyes, or your blood type. Chromosomes carry all the information about what makes you, you.

### Down syndrome:

Down syndrome is a genetic condition – it is not an illness or disease. It occurs because of an extra chromosome.

Our bodies are made up of millions of cells. There are 23 pairs of chromosomes, or 46 chromosomes, in every cell. Down syndrome is caused by the occurrence of an extra chromosome, chromosome 21. (Down syndrome is also known as trisomy 21.) People with Down syndrome then have 47 chromosomes in their cells instead of 46. This results in a range of physical characteristics, health and development indications and some level of intellectual disability. Down syndrome is usually recognisable at birth and confirmed by a blood test. It was named after Dr John Langdon Down who first described it.





Although we know how Down syndrome happens, we do not yet know why it happens. Down syndrome occurs at conception, across all ethnic and social groups and to parents of all ages. It is nobody's fault, there is no cure and it does not go away.

Down syndrome is not new, and cases have been recorded through history. Down syndrome is the most common chromosome disorder and one of every 1,158 babies born will have Down syndrome. This number has not changed significantly throughout the time that statistics have been collected.

**Inclusion:**

The Oxford Dictionary describes inclusion as "the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure; a person that is included within a whole". Inclusion is not just about being physically in the same place as others. We believe inclusion also incorporates belonging to, and to have the feeling of belonging to, a group or community. Research has shown social connection improves physical health, psychological well-being and decreases rates of anxiety and depression. People who feel included and connected have higher self-esteem and self worth, which then creates a positive feedback loop of social, emotional and physical well-being.

# Language

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The importance of using the right words cannot be underestimated and you, as the classroom teacher, are the role model for your students. Language can influence how children see other people. It is therefore important to always use the correct term, 'Down syndrome'.

## Person first language

Put the person before the disability, i.e. "John\* who has Down syndrome", or "My student Mary\* with Down syndrome". This shows that the person with Down syndrome is not defined by his or her disability, but by their name. This encourages students to think of the individual first. However, the best approach is to follow the individual's preference on how they wish to be identified.

## Words can create barriers

Words such as 'retarded' or 'handicapped' have negative connotations and should not be used. Words like 'disease', 'illness', 'suffers from', 'afflicted by' all have the ability to conjure up thoughts of a contagious medical condition and should also be avoided.

## Avoid stereotypes

All children are individuals and unique and have their own emotions, and children with Down syndrome are no different. They don't fit into the stereotype of being always happy and loving all the time.

As with typically developing children, children with Down syndrome have varying levels of ability and don't fit into a category of 'mild' or 'severe'. Along with all their other traits and characteristics, they have Down syndrome and their ability is enhanced by quality education and inclusion.



# Preparation and activities

## Tell the students

A week before the allocated date, send a note home with your students to explain World Down Syndrome Day and what the Lots of Socks exercise is about (Attachment A).

## Plan the activities

On 21 March (or the school day just before), plan for the creative writing (or drawing) activity to be part of the curriculum.

## Discussion about uniqueness and Down syndrome

Facilitate a discussion around diversity and how we are all unique and what Down syndrome is. Attachment B can be used as a guide and can be modified to suit the class and the age group.

It may be appropriate to show a YouTube clip about inclusion or the ability of people with Down syndrome. For example:

 **Video: Supporting families touched by Down syndrome**



Or read a book. Books appropriate up to grade 2:

*My Friend Isabelle* by Amy Thrasher, or *What I like about me* by Allia Zobel Nolan.

For more suggestions, contact your local Down Syndrome Association, which can be accessed via:

 **[www.downsyndrome.org.au](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au)**





## Creative writing/drawing exercise

Facilitate a creative writing/drawing/painting piece about diversity and each person's uniqueness.

Some suggestions for writing topics:

- 'Dear future self,...' ( writing a letter to themselves to remember what the person with Down syndrome in their class has taught them).
- 'Dear Mary\*, Thank you... (a letter to the person in their class, with Down syndrome, about what they have taught them).
- 'We are all unique' – a poem about what makes us all unique.
- A recipe for the perfect person – a recipe that includes all the things that make a wonderful and unique person (see example Attachment C).
- 'Dear future friend of Mary\*,' – students write a letter that can then be put into a book to the people that will meet Mary in her future life.

Encourage presentations of students' pieces to the class. Make sure they are appropriate to be read out to all.

*\*name chosen as example*

# Attachment A

An example of a letter to send home to parents/guardians

Dear Parent/Guardian

World Down Syndrome Day is celebrated on 21 March each year.

This year, Class [insert name] will use the Lots of Socks theme created by Down Syndrome International and celebrate World Down Syndrome Day on [insert date] March. On this day, we ask that your child wear socks of their choice to school. They can be bright, colourful, short or long, the choice is endless!

During the day, we will be discussing what makes us all unique as well as Down syndrome. We will talk about inclusion and how we can all help each other to feel included. Finally, we will be carrying out a creative writing or drawing piece on what makes us unique and what Down syndrome is.

Please find below a brief definition of Down syndrome as a reference, should you want to discuss the day with your child.

*Down syndrome is a genetic condition – it is not an illness or disease. It occurs because of an extra chromosome. Our bodies are made up of millions of cells. There are 23 pairs of chromosomes, or 46 chromosomes, in every cell. Down syndrome is caused by the occurrence of an extra chromosome, chromosome 21. (Down syndrome is also known as trisomy 21.) People with Down syndrome then have 47 chromosomes in their cells instead of 46. This results in a range of physical characteristics, health and development indications and some level of intellectual disability. Down syndrome is usually recognisable at birth and confirmed by a blood test. It was named after Dr John Langdon Down who first described it. Although we know how Down syndrome happens, we do not yet know why it happens. Down syndrome occurs at conception, across all ethnic and social groups and to parents of all ages. It is nobody's fault, there is no cure and it does not go away. People with Down syndrome may find doing some activities more challenging but, just like everyone else, people with Down syndrome will continue to learn, and are good at some things and not others.*

We look forward to celebrating World Down Syndrome Day together.

Kind regards,  
(teacher's name)



# Attachment B

## Creating the right environment

Encourage all students to be ready for their next learning task, whether they are sitting at their desks or on the floor is determined by each classroom teacher.

### Exercise 1

This exercise is to highlight that we are all unique in how we look, what we like and what we do, but that we are all people, we all have our interests and we all belong to the same school community.

#### Teacher to lead the discussion

The teacher reads out a list of questions (examples listed below) and asks the students to stand up if their answer is yes.

The teacher then encourages the children to look around the room and see who else has answered yes to that same question, “Who else is the same as you?” The students are then asked to sit down ready for the next question.

Questions can be adjusted to ensure that they are age and level appropriate.

- Who has spots/stripes/flowers/pictures on their socks?
- Who has red socks on?
- Who has a brother?
- Who has a sister?
- Is your favourite colour blue/green/pink?
- Who likes going for a play/sleepover at a friend’s house?
- Who likes pizza/spaghetti/chips/fruit?
- Who has long socks?
- Who has blue eyes?
- Who goes to this (our) school? All the children stand – they are all the same!

#### Reflection:

- Discuss the fact that although some students have the same interests/likes/dislikes and stood at the same time we are all unique. Regardless of our individual characteristics, we all have similarities and differences.
- Discuss the fact that some students who stood together, who had the same colour socks, were interested in different things/have different likes.
- Engage in a discussion around the idea of getting to know someone before judging them. And the idea that we need to look beyond what someone looks like or how someone talks or acts before we judge them.



## Exercise 2

This exercise is to help students understand that there are many things to learn about each of us.

In groups of 2–4 complete a 'knee to knee', 'toe to toe' discussion. Students are asked to learn 1–4 new things about each other and report back to the class.

For example: student 1 reports on student 2, student 2 reports on student 3, student 3 reports on student 4 and student 4 reports on student 1.

## Exercise 3

This exercise is to learn specifically about Down syndrome. Remember to model your words around person first language.

### Example discussion could go as follows:

21 March is World Down Syndrome Day and we are celebrating this because we have Mary\* in our school/class. Mary is a member of our class and she was born with Down syndrome.

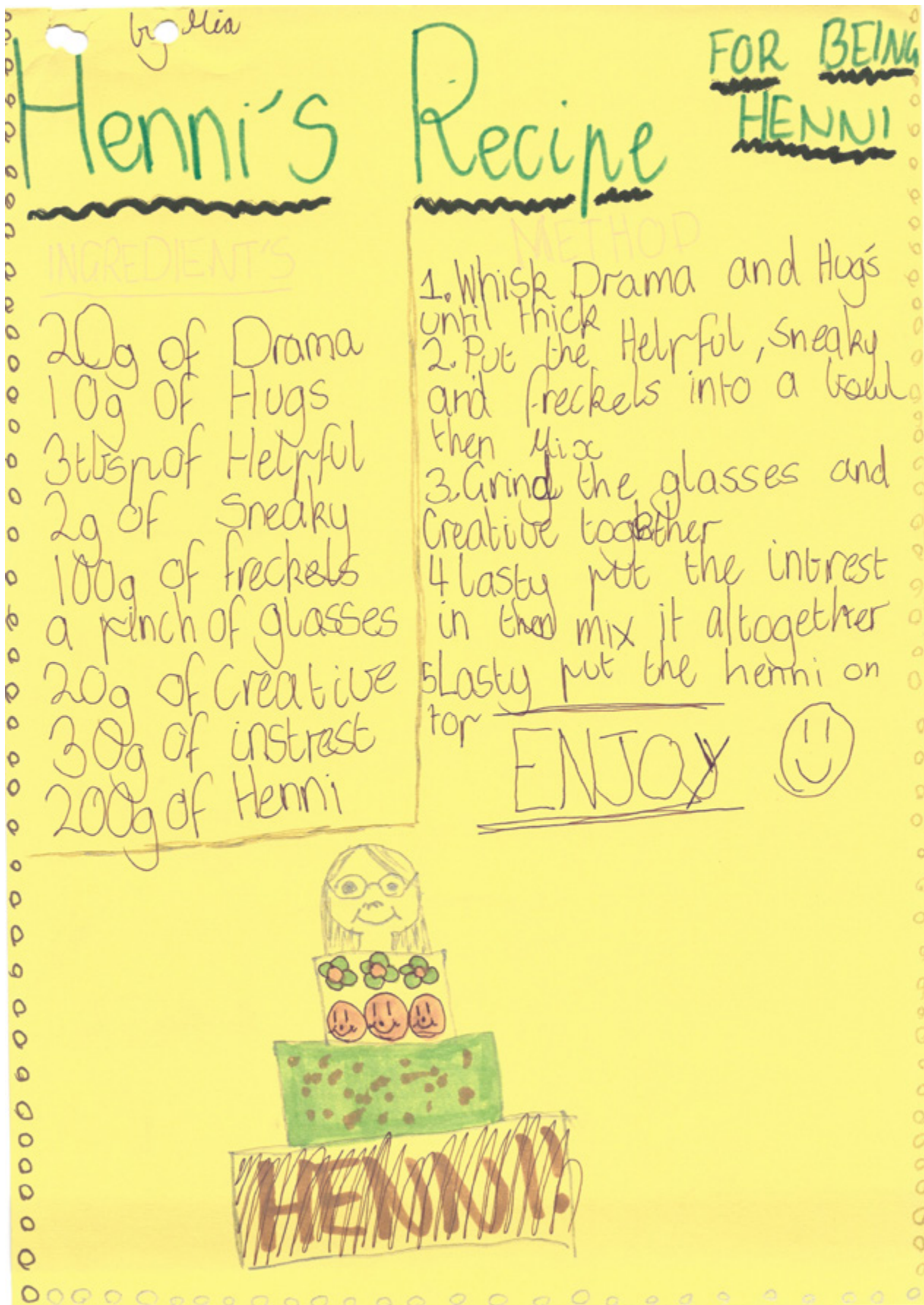
**Q** Does anyone know what Down syndrome means? (no)

**A** Down syndrome is where a baby is born with an extra chromosome in the cells in their body. This happens in utero – as the baby grows and develops inside their mum. We don't know why it happens, but it means that people with Down syndrome may take longer and need extra help with some things.

People with Down syndrome have likes and dislikes just the same as everyone else. (Use the above definition) As we have seen when Mary\* who stood up when I asked... just like some of you did.

*\*name chosen as example*

## Attachment C



# Contact details

Down Syndrome Australia works with its members and partners to provide support, information and resources to people with Down syndrome and their families. Please contact your local association on the details below for any enquiries, or to contact Down Syndrome Australia directly, email [info@downsyndrome.org.au](mailto:info@downsyndrome.org.au).

You can also visit our website at [www.downsyndrome.org.au](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au) to find more information on Down syndrome and our work.

## National: 1300 881 935

### Victoria

#### Down Syndrome Victoria

T: (03) 9486 9600

Toll Free 1300 658 873

E: [info@dsav.asn.au](mailto:info@dsav.asn.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/vic](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/vic)

### Queensland

#### Down Syndrome Queensland

T: (07) 3356 6655

E: [office@downsyndromeqld.org.au](mailto:office@downsyndromeqld.org.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/qld](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/qld)

### South Australia

#### Information Service South Australia (Down Syndrome Australia)

T: 1300 344 954

E: [infoSA@downsyndrome.org.au](mailto:infoSA@downsyndrome.org.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/sa](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/sa)

### Western Australia

#### Down Syndrome WA

T: (08) 6253 4752

E: [office@downsyndromewa.org.au](mailto:office@downsyndromewa.org.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/wa](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/wa)

### Tasmania

#### Down Syndrome Tasmania Inc.

T: 1300 592 050

E: [info@downsyndrometasmania.org.au](mailto:info@downsyndrometasmania.org.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/tas](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/tas)

### Australian Capital Territory

#### ACT Down Syndrome & Intellectual Disability Association

T: (02) 6290 0656

E: [admin@actdsa.org.au](mailto:admin@actdsa.org.au)

W: [www.downsyndrome.org.au/act](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au/act)



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## Disclaimer

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