



Down Syndrome
Australia

Dance Instructors (for groups with young adults)

This resource has been developed to help dance instructors understand and support inclusion for young adults with Down syndrome in mainstream dance groups. Many dance instructors want to be inclusive but aren't sure how to take the next steps. Below are some important, yet simple, steps that you can embrace to reduce the barriers for people with Down syndrome and their families to being involved and included.

“Be positive. Be patient. Be supportive. Embrace difference. Create a culture of inclusion and support. This works for everyone, not just the person with Down syndrome. Be quick with praise and give it often.”

Parent of a child with Down syndrome

Things you should know about Down syndrome

Down syndrome is the most common genetic disability. Approximately 13,000 people in Australia have Down syndrome. It is a disability that impacts

intellectual development, some physical characteristics, and aspects of a person's physical health. Because no two people are alike, this will vary from one person to another.

People with Down syndrome often have low muscle tone. This can affect how they move and may mean that they need some extra support when participating in physical activity like a dance class.

Principles of inclusion

Every person, regardless of disability or other difference, has a right to choose and participate in community activities. The *Disability Discrimination Act* makes it unlawful to exclude someone based on having a disability.

Being inclusive is about providing a range of opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds, to participate, to learn, to contribute, and to belong, and supporting them to take part in the most appropriate manner possible for each individual. Inclusion can mean different things in different settings but the goal is to ensure fair participation for people with and without a disability.

It's important to see each person as an individual. Get to know the person and work with them and their family to understand abilities and strategies to support the person in the activity.

Communication:

Communication is key. Clear, open, positive, respectful communication with the person with Down syndrome is a really important part of supporting participation. Some helpful suggestions are:

- Talk directly to the person with Down syndrome. Build rapport and trust with them. Listen to them as they explain their needs.
- Some people may not use speech to communicate, or may use little speech, but they will still understand and will still communicate, just in different ways such as gestures, signs or they may use an app or other way.
- Keep directions simple, brief and to the point. Use descriptive verbal cues where possible. Eg. “move your arms like a tree in the wind”.
- Consider using visual cues to help people understand the activity, such as gestures and demonstrating movements while you explain them.
- Ask questions one at a time and encourage the person to ask questions back. Be patient as it may take more time for a person with Down syndrome to respond.
- Check back with the person if they have understood what has been said, using open-ended questions. Otherwise the person may just say “Yes”, they’ve understood, because they feel unsure or embarrassed and don’t want to be negative.
- Work with the person’s family and friends if the person with Down syndrome wants them involved. Families are often proactive, supportive and willing to share information and strategies to help the person.
- Talk about disability and inclusion in your organisation. Normalising disability and discussing disability with your colleagues, other students and their families, can help reduce stigma and discrimination. This could include articles in the dance group’s newsletter, ebulletin or social media, though it is important to gain permission from the person with Down syndrome if you wish to mention them or their disability specifically.

Making adaptations to the activity

Some considerations that can be used to support participation and inclusion are:

- Being aware of all the participants in your group.
- Ensuring participants are correctly positioned, within visual range.
- Using appropriate physical assistance — guide a participant’s body parts through a movement.
- Reduce competitive elements, focus on participation initially.

Tips to support participation are:

1. Have a clear structure for the class and try to keep to a similar structure each week.
2. Revise what was learnt last week before starting anything new.
3. Have high but reasonable expectations. People with disabilities might take longer to learn the moves and might have trouble executing them to perfection but they can still learn even if it does take a bit longer.
4. People with disabilities may take the same course a number of times before they feel confident that they have learned the dance moves well enough to move to the next level.
5. Having the person with a disability work with the instructor first before being partnered with other students may help with the learning process.
6. Take every opportunity to involve more people with disabilities in the whole process to promote inclusion at every level. People with Down syndrome can help with the set up and packing up of the rooms.

Down syndrome association contact details

There is a Down syndrome association in each state and territory. You can contact these associations for support and advice. We are here to help you. Our associations are made up of a wide range of parents, professionals and people with Down syndrome who work or volunteer with us. Please visit our website at www.downsyndrome.org.au or call 1300 881 935 to be automatically connected to your closest association.

This tip sheet has been developed in consultation with people with Down syndrome. Thanks to Jess from Western Australia for her contribution to this resource.