



Down Syndrome
Australia

Inclusion for social groups

This resource has been developed to help social groups understand and support inclusion for people with Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome have similar interests and hobbies as people without disabilities. Socialising and talking to people in the social group setting is just as important for people with Down syndrome as others. People with Down syndrome want and need friends in their lives and value the opportunity to make friends and socialise.

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 may have some difficulty communicating and this can make it harder for them to make social connections but with support this can be overcome and they can participate along with everyone else.

Principles of inclusion

Every person, regardless of disability or other difference, has a right to choose and participate in everyday activities in everyday places. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* 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, learn, contribute and belong. This might be at a book club, a drama group or a social committee for a community activity, depending on what interests them as an individual.

Communication

Communication is fundamental to supporting inclusion in any setting. Clear, open, positive, respectful communication with the person with Down syndrome is all that is needed. More detailed information about communication is available at: www.communityinclusion.com.au.

Some useful approaches include:

- Build rapport and trust with the person with Down syndrome.

- Some people may not use speech to communicate, or may use little speech, but they will still understand when you speak. They may communicate in different ways such as gestures or signs, or they may use an app or device.
- Be patient and provide enough time for the person to respond as it sometimes takes people with Down syndrome a little longer.
- Communicate clearly and simply. Don't provide multiple talking points at once.
- Ask questions one at a time and encourage the person to ask questions back.
- Check back with the person if they have understood what has been said using open-ended questions. Otherwise a person may just indicate they've understood because they feel unsure or embarrassed and don't want to be negative.
- Provide any written information in plain language or a visual format if that is what the person needs.
- Communicate clearly any arrangements about meeting times for the group. Consider using visuals and images to support communication.
- Most importantly, ask the person with Down syndrome if there is anything you can do that would make them feel more included.
- Consider the transport options for the person with Down syndrome. Is public transport accessible at the meeting time? Could someone offer a lift? Is a taxi required?
- Provide any written information in plain language or a visual format.

Where to go for more information

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.

Supporting social engagement and participation

Below are some important, yet simple, tips that you can embrace to reduce the barriers for people with Down syndrome to being involved and included at social opportunities.

- Think about the environment and sensory considerations. People with Down syndrome may be sensitive to noise and lighting. Look at signage and whether this is clear or could be improved. Consider the accessibility of the venue where the group meets.
- Encourage good social etiquette and the right conversation for the right location.
- A person with Down syndrome may need support to attend. This might be a support worker or transport to and from. Conversation should still be directed at the person with Down syndrome, not their support worker.
- Consider personal safety for the activity. If the group meets in the evening you may want to talk to the person with Down syndrome about how they will get to and from the location.