



**Down Syndrome  
Australia**

## **Supporting social inclusion in schools**

*This information has been developed to provide advice to teachers, families and people with Down syndrome about how to support, promote and enable social inclusion for students with Down syndrome.*

Inclusive education is not only about supporting the rights of a child with Down syndrome to education within a common learning environment, it should also focus on building the social networks and connections necessary for that person to be an active, contributing, and valued member of the school community. For children and young people, school is an important space where a sense of belonging and connection is formed, sustained and supported through both formal and informal activities and interactions.

Research has shown that students who feel more accepted, included and involved in their school are more likely to be engaged in classroom learning, in extracurricular activities, in interpersonal relationships, and in the wider school community.



Developing friendships during the school years is important for all students as it establishes the foundations for future friendships. Students who grow up around disability are more likely to be comfortable and knowledgeable and see the value of inclusion across all areas of society.

This resource outlines some of the ways that educators, teachers, students and the broader school community can support building social connections in the educational setting for kids with Down syndrome.

- Ensure that students with Down syndrome have the same opportunities as other students to be involved in all social activities that the school community offers, e.g. excursions, discos, sports days.
- Don't expect or rely on the family of the student with Down syndrome to attend school activities, like excursions or sports days, in a support role. It should never be an expectation for families to attend in order for the child to be involved.
- Using peer to peer supports is a great way for all involved to learn, build friendships and have someone to turn for help. It is important however, that any 'buddy' initiative is not just to provide a support for the student with Down syndrome.

Students with Down syndrome should also be provided with the opportunity and any support required to be a buddy to others as well.

- Talk regularly to all students about abilities and differences and how each student has something unique to contribute to the class.
- Students should have the opportunity to first develop friendships organically, however a simple adjustment could be made for students who are experiencing difficulties establishing friendships. A 'circle of friends' approach may be used to strategically plan lunch time play activities which supports all students to participate. [Note: This approach is only recommended where there is a demonstrated need.]
- If the Learning Support Assistant (LSA) is available at break times, ensure they are using their time to strategically facilitate play time, sports play or club work between the student with Down syndrome and their peers. Rather than being physically involved in play, the LSA should be encouraged to 'fade in and out' with support as necessary. A student who is being 'mothered' by the LSA, or spends break times only with the LSA, is less likely to be socially accepted by their peers.
- Ensure that the delivery of learning and supports in the classroom does not isolate the student with Down syndrome. Instead, it should provide opportunities for them to participate and be seen by their peers as a full member of the classroom. An LSA that is too closely attached and seen as a 'personal teacher' can hinder social and academic inclusion.

## 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](http://www.downsyndrome.org.au) or call 1300 881 935 to be automatically connected to your closest association.

### Other helpful links:

All Means All - [www.allmeansall.org.au](http://www.allmeansall.org.au)

Family Advocacy - [www.family-advocacy.com](http://www.family-advocacy.com)

Maryland coalition for Inclusive Education - [www.mcie.org](http://www.mcie.org)

Swift Education Centre - [www.swiftschools.org](http://www.swiftschools.org)

Inclusion International - [www.inclusion-international.org](http://www.inclusion-international.org)

Children with Disability Australia - [www.cyda.org.au](http://www.cyda.org.au)

Australian Research Centre for Children and Youth - [www.aracy.org.au](http://www.aracy.org.au)

Human Rights Commission - [www.humanrights.gov.au](http://www.humanrights.gov.au)