

Typical Speech and Language difficulties for children with Downs's syndrome.

- Children with DS often have a speech and language impairment and are often late starting to talk.
- They also follow a pattern of language development which differs from typical development .
- They have significant delay in speech and language production relative to their **non verbal** abilities .
- **However they are often keen communicators** - they can use and understand sign, gesture and body language to support and develop their communication skills.
- Vocabulary is learned slowly & steadily – especially nouns
- Expressive – Receptive gap – children with DS can understand more than they can say.
- Early grammar is delayed and learned slowly & is paced by the size of the child's vocabulary - need to acquire a vocabulary of approx. 300 words before developing and applying grammar)
- Will often speak using key words and leaving out the connecting words - “telegraphic” speech e.g. “*sit chair*”
- Spoken grammar lags behind understanding
- More complex grammar specifically delayed
- Smaller vocabulary = less general knowledge.
- Problems with articulation may result in the child being unwilling to speak in longer sentences and they may self-limit as a result.
- Difficulties understanding the specific language of the curriculum.

Strengths

- Often keen and natural communicators
- Often good social Interaction skills
- Visual skills
- Signing and gesture, understanding body language, facial expression etc

Speech and Language can be compromised by

- Hearing difficulties
- Difficulties with Auditory attention & Auditory memory - listening, staying focused, ability to process & retain information
- Difficulties with auditory discrimination.

Signing

- Research shows children with DS do **not** learn words easily from speech input alone
- All benefit from up to 100 signs with spoken word.
- Children have larger vocabularies when in sign supported programmes
25% of 4 year olds still need to use sign as major mode of communication and should be taught new signs alongside speech and reading
- Signing is a bridge for spoken language - “keyword” signs augment speech.
- Signing will not inhibit speech but promote it.

- Signs dropped as children learn to talk.
- Signing reduces frustration – helps communication.

How to help

- Make use of child's strong visual skills & support all language **visually**– gesture and sign, pictures, print, drawings & symbols and concrete objects .
- Surround by **good language models**.
- Use simple, direct language. Clear, concise instructions.
- Phrase questions which require more than a yes/no.
- Give extra time for child to process and organize response.
- Work on speech sounds - accurate production /articulation skills
- Target comprehension & vocabulary through games & reading to acquire 300-word level (when grammar kicks in) by age 5-6.
- Practice sentence structure
- Use 'carrier phrases' to help develop sentences:
I like.....I want....
- Teach prepositions through games.
- Develop reading
- Teach grammar through reading.
- Conversation diary.
Develop listening and attention skills
- Develop memory skills ,
- Develop articulation and letter sound games
- Use a home-school Diary to develop communication between child and home and school– insert drawings / photos, key words and phrases etc.

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