

# A QUICK GUIDE TO DOWN SYNDROME FOR PARENTS

A student in your child's school or class has Down syndrome. The purpose of this guide is to give you quick and handy information so that you can comfortably answer any questions that come up at home. If you have further questions, please reach out to The Down Syndrome Association Gauteng (TSDAG).

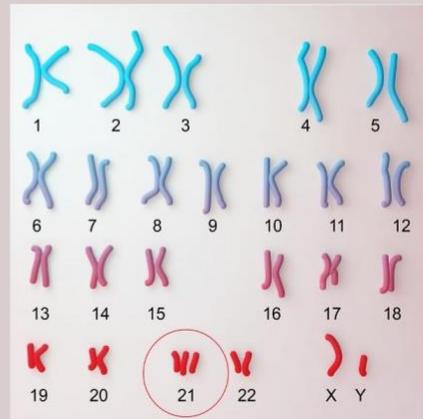
## What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome is a genetic condition that comes from an extra chromosome 21.

Most people have 46 chromosomes in each of their cells; people with Down syndrome have 47.

Your genes make your chromosomes, and decide things like your height, your eye colour, your hair colour, and your skin colour. Having an extra chromosome affects your body too. An extra chromosome can cause troubles with things like the heart, digestion, learning and memory, and muscle tone. People with DS might be affected by some or all of these things.

This is a picture that shows the extra 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome for a person with Down syndrome. The extra chromosome could be in some or all of the person's cells in their body.



## Why do people with Down syndrome need extra help at school?

People with DS need extra practice to learn new things. They might need someone to help them stay focused. People with DS have to use more energy to do the same things that other students do, so they get tired more quickly. This means they might need to take more breaks during the day.

## Is Down syndrome a sickness I can get?

No. Down syndrome is not a sickness. You cannot catch DS by spending time with someone who has it. People with DS are born that way, and will have it their whole lives.

## Why do people with Down syndrome talk differently?

People with DS talk differently because their mouth is small and it has a slightly different shape. This means that there is less room for talking in their mouth. Some people with DS have trouble with feeling in their mouth, kind of like after you go to the dentist and it is hard to talk. Some people with DS have a hard time with breathing. This means that it can be hard to talk since breathing is more important than talking!

## How can I be friends with a person with Down syndrome?

Some things are the same for all kids: having fun, having friends, feeling good at something, and feeling included are important for everyone. Remember that the things that make kids the same are more important than the ways that they might be different from others.

There are lots of friendly things a peer can do to be friendly: you can say “hi,” and invite a student with DS to come and play. You can share toys. Being kind, sharing, being patient, and being inclusive are great things to do for ALL students.

## What should I do if I don't understand a person with Down syndrome?

Sometimes it is hard to understand what people with DS are trying to communicate, and that can feel uncomfortable. Here are some things you can try:

- Ask them to say it again.
- Ask them to try saying it slower, or showing you what they mean by pointing.
- Ask a teacher or helper if they know what the student means.
- Tell the student that it is okay to try again later if they are getting frustrated.



The Down Syndrome Association Gauteng