

## FACTS ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME

- Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal abnormality occurring 1 in every 800 births. The exact cause is unknown.
- Down syndrome is one of the leading clinical causes of delayed development in the world – it is not related to race, nationality, religion or socio-economic status.
- Approximately 80% of babies with Down syndrome are born to women under 30 years of age.
- 30% - 50% of the individuals with Down syndrome have heart defects and 8% - 12% have gastrointestinal tract abnormalities present at birth. Most of these defects are now correctable by surgery.
- There is wide variation in mental abilities, behaviour and physical development in individuals with Down syndrome. Each individual has his/her own unique personality, capabilities and talents.
- Individuals with Down syndrome benefit from loving homes, early intervention, education, appropriate medical care and positive public attitudes.
- Individuals with Down syndrome learn at different rates and benefit from inclusive classroom settings just like their peers.
- Increasingly people with Down syndrome are completing high school, gaining job skills, finding meaningful employment, pursuing post-secondary education, and getting married.
- The intentional strengthening of human connections in healthy, inclusive communities that nurture values of interdependence and practice natural forms of mutual support benefits people with Down syndrome as it does every Canadian.
- In adulthood, many persons with Down syndrome hold jobs, live independently and enjoy recreational opportunities in their communities.
- The Canadian Down Syndrome Society is a national non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons with Down syndrome.

## LANGUAGE GUIDELINES

- The correct spelling is Down syndrome. There is no apostrophe “s” (Down). The reason is because in English adding an apostrophe indicates that ownership is involved. Dr. John Langdon Down provided the first formal description of the syndrome, but he did not have Down syndrome and thus no possessive is used. Also, the “s” in syndrome is not capitalized.
- Use person-first language. Individuals with Down syndrome are people first. The emphasis should be on the individual, not the disability. For example; a baby/child/adult with Down syndrome, not “Down syndrome” child or “Downs baby”.
- Down syndrome is a chromosomal abnormality that is present at conception. The term “birth defect” is not correct.
- Down syndrome is a developmental disability. People with Down syndrome usually have mild to moderate intellectual delay. The term mental retardation is considered outdated in Canada and should be avoided. The term mongoloid is considered extremely inappropriate.
- Avoid generalizing people with Down syndrome as “always loving”, “always smiling”, or “perpetually happy”. People with Down syndrome are not all alike. The diversity of abilities and characteristics among individuals with Down syndrome can be best described as the same for the general population.
- Avoid judgmental terminology. A person with Down syndrome is not “suffering from”, “a victim of”, “afflicted with” Down syndrome. Down syndrome is not a disease and these references only diminish a person’s dignity. Suggestions include “living with Down syndrome” or “has a medical condition known as Down syndrome”.
- People with Down syndrome have the same rights as everyone else and should be treated with respect.

Recommended:

A Way with Words: Guidelines and appropriate terminology for the portrayal of persons with disabilities. Human Resources Development Canada, 1998. 10/24/02