



*...each of us is
different from the
next person in our
own special way*

Talking to siblings about Down syndrome

Keep your information honest and realistic, at a level appropriate to the age of the child. Be factual and avoid value-loaded statements; try to always include positives.

Balance the amount of information for the child's age. For younger children keep it simple and use language they are familiar with – use picture books to make it more interesting (there are examples on the DSV *Siblings resource list*). Feed in more information as the children get older and offer age-appropriate books and other information written for children and siblings.

For very young children, there may not be a need to say anything, but take care not to *avoid* mentioning Down syndrome. Allow the term to become part of your family's vocabulary. If you meet, or see pictures of, children or adults with Down syndrome, mention that this person has Down syndrome, like their sibling.

Acknowledge the disability and differences associated with it, but do not let it dominate identity. Down syndrome is only a part of who that person is – and it affects, but does not determine, development. Talk together about the strengths of each of you and the things you are less good at, or still learning about. Remind children too that each of us is different from the next person in our own special way – there is no one right way to be, and part of growing up is learning to appreciate and respect all sorts of differences in people.

Try to achieve a balance between providing information without over-emphasising difference or allowing it to become a key part of the person's identity – keep in clear focus for you and the children, that their brother or sister with Down syndrome has far more in common with you and them than they have differences.

Avoid passing on unhelpful and outdated stereotypes or creating an overall impression of limitations. For questions relating to the more distant future (eg relationships, employment etc), point out that it is a bit early to know anything about this for any of your children.

Reassure siblings that this brother or sister can be expected to do and learn the same things as them – it may take longer and they may need extra help for some things.

Explain that Down syndrome is nobody's fault – it just happens in

information provided by
Down Syndrome Victoria
219 Napier Street
Fitzroy Victoria 3065
T: 1300 658 873
F: (03) 9486 9601
E: info@dsav.asn.au

www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au

some people. It does not go away and it cannot be 'caught' by others. Point out too that it is just one part of who their sibling is.

For older children ensure that they have clear simple and positive information to help them respond to questions at school and from their peers and to help them counter negative assumptions.

Each family will deal with talking to siblings in a different way – listen to other people's opinions as to what is good, but try to keep a clear focus on your own family and what will be right for you.

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