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*Down Syndrome Association  
of Central Texas*

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# Peer Presentation

Opening the Doors to Friendships

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1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Grade

# What is a Peer Presentation?

A short 15-20 minute classroom or grade level presentation tailored around a specific student to address any issues related to their disability that others in the class may need help to understand.

## Why a Peer Presentation?

- To foster understanding and appreciation for diversity using the core foundation of our schools where children naturally interact.
- Parents and professionals find that when classmates understand a student's disability, they may become allies in helping the student and less likely to view accommodations or individual support as unfair advantages.
- Following peer presentations, there is often improvement in the way students with Down syndrome are perceived and treated.

## Who should be there?

- **Classmates** (all in the grade if possible or just the class)
- **The child with Down syndrome** (*This is optional and up to the parents*)
- **Support Staff** (as many as possible)
  - All educators who are on the IEP team;
  - Administrative staff (if pertinent);
  - School Counselor;
  - School Nurse; and
  - Parents of student (if not presenting).

*“When there’s an obvious difference and no one is talking about it, children become confused and think there must be something ‘bad’ about it,”* said one mother.

# Getting Ready...

Preparation is the key to success!

Give yourself time to gather all of the materials you will need ahead of time! Read through the materials and Practice!

## First things first:

- Talk to your teacher and administrators to set a date.
- Read through the materials
- Gather all of the materials that you will need
- PRACTICE running through it a few times!

## Parent decisions and preparations:

- Should the student be present or not?
- Create a list of GOALS for interactions with the classmates
- Create a “Superstar” list
  - List of hobbies, things their child enjoys
  - List of things your child likes and dislikes

## Materials you will need

- **DSACT “Peer Presentation” Kit** (*can be checked out from DSACT office*)
  - DSACT Video about Down syndrome
  - Books about Down syndrome
  - 1 pair thick socks per student
  - Letter to parents
  - ❖ Sign language handout
  - ❖ DSACT “Share the Passion” Calendars
- **Additional Materials**
  - Jumbo marshmallows (1 per student)
  - TV and DVD player
  - Cotton balls (2 per student)
- **Handouts for the end**
  - Copies of DS101 for students
    - Peer modeling
    - Being a friend
  - Letter to classroom parents
  - ❖ DSACT give-aways
  - ❖ Share the Passion Calendars
  - ❖ Invitation to their BW team or brochure

❖ *Optional*

# Tips for each age group

	1st – 3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade and Up
How children respond	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Children at this age want to know more about what caused the child's disability.</li><li>• These children are more sensitive to others' feelings and may ask their questions in private.</li><li>• Sometimes shy or hesitant children may worry about or fear relating to a child with special needs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Older students may focus more on themselves than on a student with a disability.</li><li>• They are more concerned about their own feelings of discomfort, embarrassment, and anxiety than about how to relate to a student with special needs.</li><li>• As a result, students this age may appear calloused and unfeeling, and seem to ignore or exclude the child with a disability. This exclusion is a clue to their discomfort and inability to relate.</li></ul>
What you can do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Answer children's questions openly and honestly. If you don't know the answer, say so.</li><li>• Teach children how to relate to children with disabilities by modeling appropriate behavior. For example, show respect and kindness while considering children's limitations.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have a class discussion when the student with a disability isn't present. Focus on their thoughts and feelings. Help them see the world from the viewpoint of the student with special needs.</li><li>• Brainstorm for ways to show kindness.</li></ul>

## Presentation Outline

- Icebreaker(s)
  - The “Superstar List”
  - More Alike Than Different
- DSACT video
- Down syndrome 101
  - What is Down syndrome?
  - Hypotonia
  - Speech
  - Hearing
- Opening the Doors to Friendships
  - Peer modeling
  - How to be a friend
- Q&A
- Hand out the peer packets and giveaways.

## Goals

1. To increase understanding of disabilities and see the similarities AND differences between people.
2. To provide language and knowledge about Down Syndrome.
3. To ask for the students’ help in supporting and teaching their classmates with Down Syndrome or other differences or special needs.

## Ground Rules

- No questions are silly.
- Ask for clarification if you don’t understand something.

# Icebreakers

Getting the discussion started – CHOOSE ONE

## Superstar List

## More Alike Than Different

- |                          | Superstar List  | More Alike Than Different  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Preparation</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Before presentation, ask parents to prepare a list of things that are unique about the child with Down syndrome (travels, hobbies, accomplishments).</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask parent of student with Down syndrome for a list of the things he or she likes and dislikes.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Class Exercise</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask all students to stand. Then go down “superstar list” and ask questions. Have you ever traveled to Hawaii? If not, then sit down. Have you ever won a medal for swimming? If not, then sit down.</li><li>• Continue asking questions until everyone is seated.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask the students questions, like “How many of you like to watch TV/ go swimming/ go to birthday parties?” “Who wants to go to college / get married/ drive a car some day?”</li><li>• After each response, let the students know that their friend with Down syndrome likes the same things they do!</li></ul> |
| <b>Discussion points</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When everyone is sitting down, talk about the “superstar” who has done things no other children in the class have done. Wow!</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talk about appreciation of diversity and recognizing that people have similar interests, likes and dislikes.</li><li>• “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” What does that mean? Ask students to see beyond the outside and make friends with the person. You’ll be surprised at how alike you are!</li></ul>    |

# It's all about Respect

Treating others the way you want to be treated

## For younger students

- Making fun of people isn't funny.
- Does it feel good when other people call us names?
- We're all different, aren't we?
- Wouldn't feel good if people called you names or said mean things about you because you have blue eyes and they have brown?

## For older students

- How would **YOU** want to be treated by your classmates if you had been born with Down syndrome?
- 5-10 minute discussion of all students' need for inclusion
  - want to be included at recess
  - lunch time
  - being friends
  - Parties
- Ask questions if necessary to stimulate dialogue:
  - How would you feel if you sat alone every day at lunch? What can you do if you see any kid sitting alone? How do you feel if someone says they don't want to play with you?
  - Name calling / "R" word

*"When there's an obvious difference and no one is talking about it, children become confused and think there must be something 'bad' about it," said one mother.*



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# PRESENTATION

Can use the following as a PowerPoint presentation  
or as handouts.

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# Down Syndrome in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

**Watch the Video**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l13KxRYqoo0>

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# What is Down Syndrome

What does it mean?

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Three adult words you will learn today: **GENES**, **CELLS** and **CHROMOSOMES**

- We all have **GENES**. They are your body's instruction set, and they are tiny. When your body gets instructions, the only thing it knows to do is follow the instructions. Have you ever wondered how your body knew to grow 2 eyes, 2 ears but one nose? Genes told your body how to grow. Genes come in packages called chromosomes.
- Our body is made up of **CELLS**, trillions of them and that they can only be seen with a microscope.
- Inside each cell are **CHROMOSOMES**. At conception we each receive 23 chromosomes from our mom and 23 chromosomes from our dad. So how many chromosomes do we have in each cell of our body?

# The Science of the body

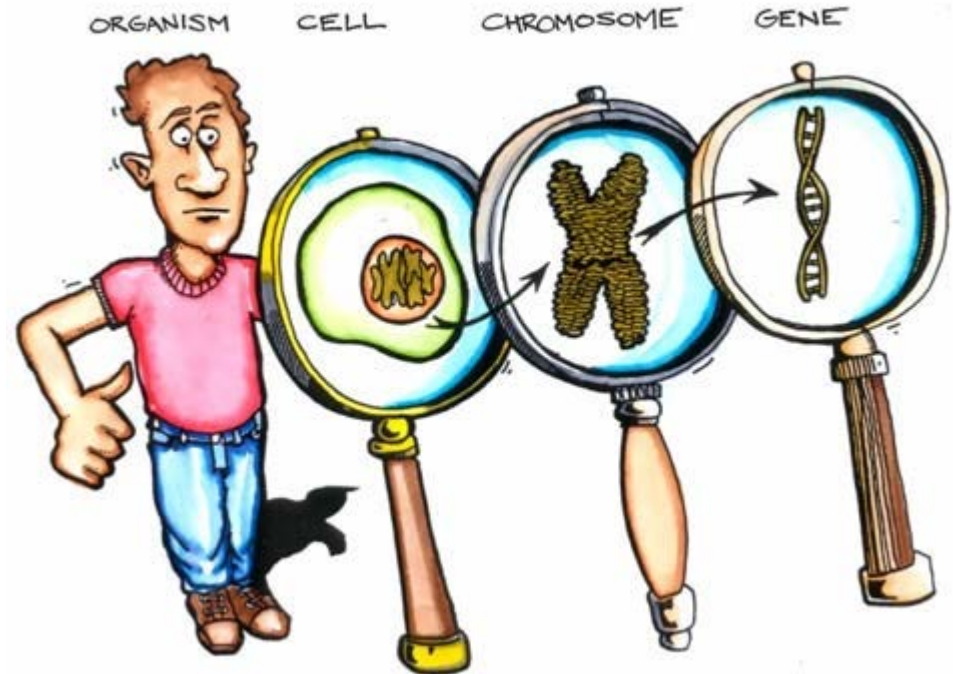
New words: CELLS, CHROMOSOMES, and GENES

Your body is made up of **CELLS**, trillions of them and that they can only be seen with a microscope.

Each Cell contains **CHROMOSOMES** which are packets of information. Everyone in this room has 23 sets or pairs of **CHROMOSOMES**.

Each of the **CHROMOSOMES** contains hundreds of **GENES**. These **GENES** are the instructions or blueprints of what you look like and how your body works.

- Have you ever wondered how your body knew to grow 2 eyes, 2 ears but one nose? **GENES** told your body how to grow.
- **GENES** decided what color your eyes, hair and skin are and how many freckles you have.
- **GENES** are also responsible for telling your body to function so that you don't have to think about things like making your heartbeat, making your eyes blink, or breathing.
- **GENES** designed everything about your body.



# The Science of Down Syndrome

So what is different?

People with Down syndrome have an extra copy of the 21<sup>st</sup> **CHROMOSOME**. When this happens some things come out a little differently.

Imagine baking a cake. What would happen if you added a little extra of one or more ingredients?

Would you still have a cake?

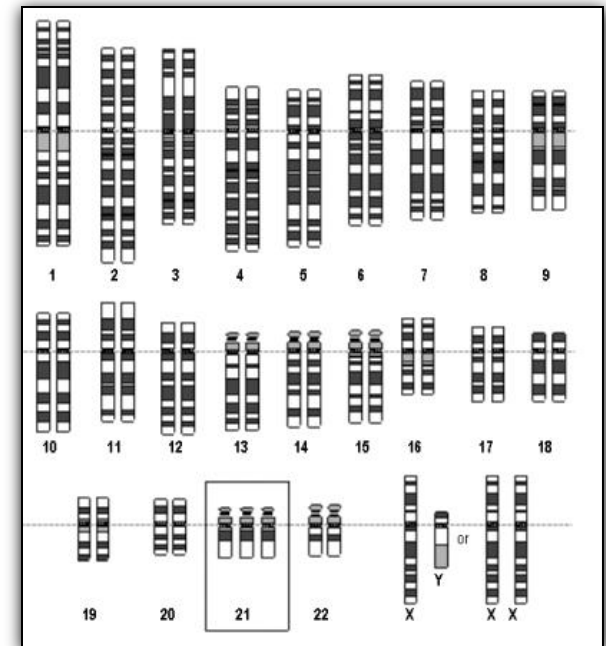
What would happen to that cake?

Sometimes the extra **CHROMOSOME** causes medical conditions that make things harder for people with Down syndrome. (low muscle tone, heart problems, hearing, eyesight)

Down syndrome is a condition and not a disease.

You cannot catch Down syndrome like you can catch a cold or virus. It is in their **GENES** so it is something you are just born with—like blond hair and blue eyes.

If you have Down syndrome when you are born, you will have it your whole life.



# More Info on Down Syndrome

- Down syndrome is very common. In fact, it is the most common chromosomal abnormality in humans, which occurs once in every 733 births.
- There are people with Down syndrome from every race, nationality, religion, and background. It occurs equally in boys and girls.
- It doesn't run in families, and nothing the parents did when they were pregnant causes Down syndrome. Doctors and experts are not really sure what causes it. It just happens randomly, like flipping a coin or winning the lottery.
- People with Down syndrome can grow up to go to college, get married, work, and live a long happy life --- just like you! They want to make friends, do fun things, and be included in the classroom, lunch and at recess.

# Challenges to overcome

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- People with Down syndrome have extra challenges that you don't have:
  - **Low muscle tone (Hypotonia)**
    - On the plus side this makes our friend super flexible
    - It is what makes speech more difficult.
    - Fine motor skills are harder (writing, cutting, buttoning, etc)
  - **Hearing loss**
  - **Eyesight problems**
  - **Shorter auditory memory**
- These are why our friends may have extra help in the classroom or do their classwork in a different way.
- These are also things that our friends need your patience and sometimes your help.
- We will do some exercises to help you understand our friend better.

# Exercise: Hypotonia

## Low muscle tone

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***Hypotonia** is a medical term used to describe decreased muscle tone (the amount of resistance to movement in a muscle). It's what it feels like when your arm falls asleep when you are on the couch and you can't pick up the remote control to change the channel.*

### **Class exercise:**

1. Ask students put oven mitts or thick socks on their hands. Then ask them to take the cap off a pen, get out their paper, and write their names with their non-dominant hand!
  - Let the students struggle to remove cap and coordinate pen to write on board.
2. Ask them to write down a short sentence that you say out loud with their non-dominant hand.
  - You will hear complaints to slow down or repeat the sentence several times.

### **Discussion points:**

- Mention the size and legibility of their writing.
- Point out that students with Down syndrome have muscle hypotonia so their paper may look different.
- Discuss frustration
  - How it feels when you want to be able to do something but you can't.
  - How much harder it was to remember the sentence when you had to concentrate on writing because it was not longer natural or easy.
- Explain that this may cause the student not to be able to run as fast or be as coordinated and they will work **TWICE AS HARD** to do the same task.

# Exercise: Speech

## Understanding each other

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*People with Down syndrome have differences in the mouth and throat areas that make it more difficult for them to eat, drink, and be understood when they are speaking:*

- small and narrow upper jaw, and a high arch/ roof of mouth;
- low muscle tone, and weak oral facial muscles.

### **Class Exercise:**

- Have students put a large marshmallow on the top of their tongue.
- Ask them to tell the person next to them what they ate for dinner last night/ what they want for Christmas/ what their favorite color is.
- Ask students for a show of hands about whether they could understand each other.

### **Discussion points:**

- Frustration – imagine how you'd feel if you kept trying and trying but people couldn't understand you.
- Remind them of muscle hypotonia and that the student with Down syndrome has to work twice as hard to control muscles to make words.
- Point out their peer with Down syndrome may leave the classroom for speech therapies.

### **Strategies for understanding** the speech of their friend with Down syndrome:

- You can ask our friend to repeat what he or she said;
- You can ask our friend to show us what he or she wants; or
- You can ask the teacher.
- Sign language - If the student with Down syndrome uses sign language, teach the class 5-10 signs from DSACT handout.



# Exercise: Hearing

*65-80% of people with Down syndrome have some level of conductive hearing loss. Hearing loss may fluctuate when fluid is present or when a child is experiencing ear pain.*

## **Class Exercise:**

- Have students stick cotton balls or ear plugs in each ear. Ask them to turn to their neighbor and talk about what they ate for breakfast and lunch.
- With a show of hands, ask how many students were able to hear and understand their neighbor.

## **Discussion points:**

- It must be frustrating to want to be a part of the class or activity and not be able to hear your friends. Or not be able to hear your favorite show.
- Use example where they try to tell their parents something about what happened in school that day and they just don't understand it.
- This is why students with Down syndrome often have to sit near the teacher.

## **Strategies for understanding**

- Recognize that your friend with Down syndrome **is not "ignoring" you**. He or she wants to be your friend, but may not be able to hear you.
- Repeat yourself. Slow down and say it again. Use sign language, pictures, or symbols. Show your friend what you are talking about.
- Your friend with Down syndrome may also need extra time, so it's important to be patient!

# Big Secret #1

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I'm going to share a BIG secret with you.

**Who do you think is the BEST teacher for our friend with Down syndrome?**

- Let them discuss and shout out possibilities.
- ANSWER: Each and every one of **YOU!** You are the BEST teachers for our friend and very important in his or her life.

# Opening the Door to friendship



## Mother Hen Syndrome vs Peer Modeling

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### Class Exercise

- How many of you help your friend with Down syndrome tie his or her shoes? Put on his backpack?
- How many of you are going to move in with your friend when you grow up and go to his job with him and help him every day?

### Discussion Points

- Your friend with Down syndrome needs to try to do things for him or herself so that they learn!
- What can you do? You can show him or her how you put *your* backpack on. You can show him or her how you tie *your* shoes.

### How to be a good friend and teacher:

- Here are some ways you can help teach your friend with Down syndrome (*ask parents if they want to add to this list to address their child's particular areas of need*):
  - Don't talk baby talk; Speak slowly and clearly;
  - Use visual aids when you can (pictures, symbols, or just *show* them);
  - Talk to them every day (more than just hello);
  - Invite them to eat lunch with you and play with you and your friends during recess, lunch, or class; and
  - Talk with an adult if you observe hurtful things happening (either to your friend with Down syndrome – it's never okay to tease - or caused by him or her).

# Big Secret #2

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I'm going to share another BIG secret with you.

## **Did you know that by teaching someone else, you also learn?**

- That's right! Research has shown that you learn even more by teaching others than you do by being taught yourself!
- If you have an idea about how to help your friend learn, share it with your teacher. It feels good when you can help other people!

## What were the Two Big Secrets?

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YOU are the best teacher for our friends with Down syndrome!

By teaching our friend, you will also learn!



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# Questions and Answers

No questions are too silly!

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We are a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization focused on empowering individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

**Our mission** is to provide education, support, and resources to individuals with Down syndrome, their families, professionals, and the community, while building public awareness and acceptance of the abilities of individuals with Down syndrome.

**Our vision** is a world in which all members, including those with Down syndrome, are accepted, valued for their uniqueness, respected for their abilities and contributions, and assured the opportunity and choice to create their own path to fulfillment and success.

We do this through providing information, support, educational programs, social programs, informative and training workshops, outreach programs to build awareness and support to the medical, educational and general communities, and providing a supportive community for individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

We are primarily a volunteer organization with a vested interest in achieving our mission and making our vision a reality.

Please contact us at any time for more information:

DOWN SYNDROME ASSOCIATION OF CENTRAL TEXAS

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[www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com)

# Priority Areas

## What we focus on

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**Programming and Social Events** - We develop programs and social events that enrich the lives of individuals with Down syndrome. Current free programs include: Speaker Series and Behavior Management Workshops, playgroups and social events, and recreational classes such as music therapy, dance, sign language, swim classes, martial arts, and cooking.

**Education** - We provide information, resources, and support to both parents and educators to ensure that individuals with Down syndrome will receive a quality education which will prepare them for further education, employment, and/or independent living. DSACT runs a Learning Program which meets monthly throughout the school year and supplies parents with lesson plans and materials that are research based and specifically designed for children with Down syndrome.

**Caregiver Support** - We provide social and emotional support to caregivers of individuals with Down syndrome, including support upon diagnosis and a personal renewal group for mothers, as well as ongoing emotional support workshops.

**Inclusion** - We promote the inclusion of individuals with Down syndrome in our schools, communities, places of worship, recreational facilities, and places of employment. In 2008, we released a joint manual with the Austin Independent School District (AISD) for educators to use in adapting the curriculum and is still in use today.

**Awareness** - We increase public awareness, acceptance, and understanding about the abilities of individuals with Down syndrome. In October, which is Down Syndrome Awareness Month, DSACT hosts our annual Buddy Walk which is an awareness and fundraising event to support DSACT programs. We also publish our yearly "Share the Passion" calendar which pairs individuals with Down syndrome and local celebrities. We develop presentations to community groups, students, healthcare professional and educators.

**Communication** - We inform members and the community of our activities, programs, resources, and major events. We have a quarterly newsletter called "Down in the Heart of Texas", bi-monthly electronic news blasts and a resource packed website [www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com). We also host multiple Yahoo Groups that provide forums to share experiences and support to other members.

**Advocacy** - We advocate for all individuals with Down syndrome on medical, educational, independent living, employment, estate planning, and legal issues.

**En Español: Comité Latino** - We provide support, resources, and social opportunities for the Spanish-speaking community as well as ensure that all of our materials are available in Spanish on our website.



Contact us for more information



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