

SPEECH AND LANGUAGE RESOURCE GUIDE

For Adults with Down Syndrome And Their Parents

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Why can't my adult with Down syndrome communicate?

Learning to communicate is an ongoing process. The vast majority of adults with Down syndrome use speech to communicate. The most common communication problems for adults with Down syndrome are that their speech may be difficult to understand (speech intelligibility) and that they have difficulty with long conversations, with telling about what happened to them or retelling a story, and with asking for specific clarifications when they don't understand something.

What type of speech and language evaluation and treatment are needed?

For adults with Down syndrome, communication skills need to support their daily lives at home, at work, and in the community. Although very few adults go for speech and language therapy, research has shown that adults can improve their speech and language skills. One innovative treatment method used watching soap operas in a group therapy setting as a means to improve listening skills, conversational speech, and retelling stories. Adults with Down syndrome who are working in the community need to be able to navigate the transportation system and ask for help if necessary, talk and socialize with co-workers, understand and follow directions at work. Their speech needs to be understandable to other people. It is helpful if they are able to use communication technology such as voice mail and email.

In expressive language, areas that can be evaluated and worked on in therapy or at home are vocabulary, sentence formulation, answering questions, and giving vital information. The adult needs to be able to make requests and to ask for and offer clarifications when the message is not understood. Adults with Down syndrome usually do well with social interactive language. They use greetings, and scripts (automatic phrases such as hi! And see you later!) effectively. They may have difficulty with conversational skills, and tend to have short conversations or rambling conversations that veer from the topic. In the area of speech, articulation, phonology, oral motor skills, childhood apraxia of speech can be evaluated and treated if needed. Other factors that affect speech intelligibility such as stuttering and voice problems sometimes occur in adults. Self talk and vocal mannerisms such as clearing the throat also occur in adults. It is felt that self talk is used to review and process what has occurred during the day.

What can I do to improve the communication skills for an adult with down syndrome?

Specific communication difficulties can be addressed in speech therapy at any age. For adults, practice with communication skills is important. Adults who are advocates and have opportunities for public speaking often improve their communication skills. Social activities, job-related communication, volunteer or other community group activities, trips, celebrations and other events provide opportunities for people with Down syndrome to practice their communication skills.

Where can I go for help?

The National Down Syndrome Congress has an annual convention that includes information and social activities for adults with Down syndrome. Books and websites are other sources for information.

Chicoine, B. & McGuire, D.(2006). *Mental wellness in adults with Down syndrome*. Bethesda, MD: Woodbine House.

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