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*Anti-Anxiety  
Affirmations and  
Advice for Parents*

*Classmates:  
Building  
Friendships  
at School*

**SETTING UP  
FOR SUCCESS:**

*Supporting  
Students with  
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in the Classroom*

*The*  
**Back to School**  
*Issue*

**Stories of Allyship  
in the School Community**

*Plus: Q&A with Students Heading Back to the Classroom*

With the promise of a new school year comes a yearly tradition here at 3.21: our 4th Annual Back to School issue.

The return to school offers a fresh start: new learning opportunities, new friendships, new opportunities for inclusion. It also brings with it new challenges. We cover both within these pages, to prepare you and your student with Down syndrome to embrace the opportunities and overcome the challenges – and, ultimately, to make this school year a success, whatever that looks like for you.

In this issue, you'll hear from every member of the team: teachers, parents, and of course, the students themselves. Educators will find creative approaches to advancing inclusion in the classroom and effectively supporting learners with Down syndrome. Parents will find advice for handling difficult school situations, and tips for helping your child make meaningful friendships with classmates. Students will hear their peers share their goals for the year ahead and suggestions for conquering the back to school jitters.

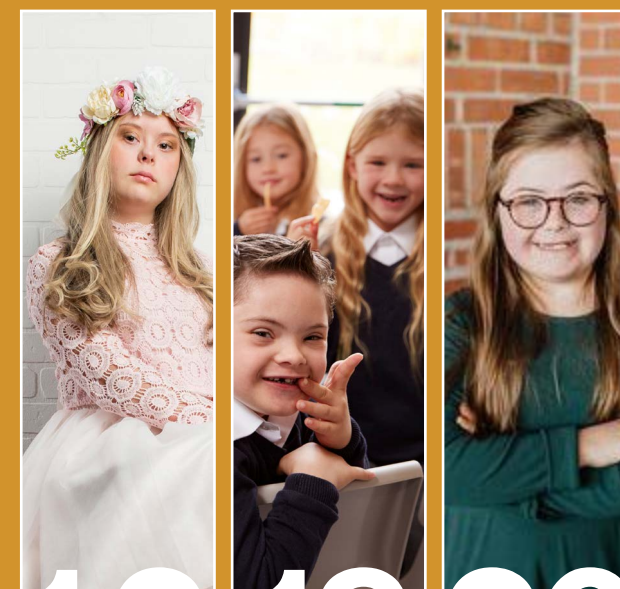
As you enter the school year, remember: accomplishments come in all shapes and sizes, and each one deserves to be

celebrated. We would love to hear about your student's wins this year. We're cheering you on!

**Courtney Cassel**  
Marketing and Communications Manager  
Canadian Down Syndrome Society

**Glen Hoos**  
Director of Communications  
Down Syndrome Resource Foundation

Drop us a line and share your article ideas at [321DSMagazine@gmail.com](mailto:321DSMagazine@gmail.com), we'd love to hear from you!



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# SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS:

## Supporting Students with Down Syndrome in the Classroom

*By Riley Rosebush RSLP and Jillian Baldwin RSLP, with Glen Hoos*

Everyone agrees that an inclusive approach to educating students with Down syndrome is ideal. But what does it look like in practice?

Inclusion means exactly what it sounds like: including students in all aspects and activities related to school life. Part of our job as educators is to identify and remove barriers to full participation for all students, including those with Down syndrome.

Success in school can look different for everyone, but supporting students to be fully included can help everyone achieve their personal goals throughout their school career. When a student has a disability, they may

experience restrictions (seen and unseen) that limit them from participating in certain situations. Bureaucratic restraints can also inhibit teachers from implementing truly inclusive practices. Here, we present strategies to help you identify and mitigate those factors at both the individual student level and the classroom level.

### **Student-Specific Factors**

When designing an inclusion plan, the goal is to remove barriers to learning and respond to each student's unique needs. This requires understanding each student on an individual level. To learn more about your student's

strengths and needs, we recommend communicating with their caregivers and community support team, including their speech and language pathologist (SLP), occupational therapist, physical therapist, behaviour consultant, and any other professionals who might have information about the student's learning and developmental needs. It's a team effort!

Below are some of the most important factors to consider.

### **Health Issues**

Health issues and complications can limit one's ability

to attend to what's around them, participate in learning activities, and gain life experiences. Simply put, when a student doesn't feel well, they have less energy to pay attention and take part. Even one poor night's sleep can significantly deplete their resources for the day.

Keep in mind that individuals with Down syndrome may have health issues, but also have a harder time identifying and expressing internal feelings, such as pain and sickness. This means that communicating with caregivers and keeping an eye on a student's health symptoms is essential. They might not be able to tell you when something is wrong.

Health-related factors that can greatly influence a child's day-to-day success include:

- **Sleep:** People with Down syndrome may experience sleep disturbances, such as obstructive sleep apnea, that can affect mood, memory, and attention.
- **Nutrition:** People with Down syndrome are more likely to have gastrointestinal issues, allergies, and sensitivities, or other issues with eating and drinking that impact the quality of nutrition and hydration they receive.
- **Physical Activity:** Some children with Down syndrome have low muscle tone, which makes it easier for these students to fatigue during activities. Too much or too little physical activity can impact a student's readiness to learn and join in. Most students with Down syndrome benefit from movement breaks and rest periods throughout the day.
- **Mood:** Like all of us, students with Down syndrome are susceptible to mood changes. However, they may have fewer strategies and communication skills with which to appropriately express their feelings. Mental health issues such as anxiety can also affect people with Down syndrome, but may be expressed and perceived differently than in neurotypical people.
- **Differences in Motivation:** Research suggests that some people with Down syndrome have an overall lower level of internal or intrinsic motivation to take on challenging tasks. This means they are less likely to want to do something 'just because' everyone else is doing it. This is especially true for new, more difficult, or less preferred activities. We need to consider how we can make the activity more motivating, perhaps by adding some rewards, changing the level of challenge, or incorporating their preferences and interests. Ask and consider what the student does find motivating, and focus on their personal strengths to help them learn in a way that's meaningful to them.

### Perceptual and Sensory Skills

Individuals with Down syndrome may also have perceptual or sensory challenges which cause difficulty taking in, tolerating, processing, and interpreting what they

see, hear, smell, and feel. Students may exhibit certain behaviours to try to calm themselves and make sense of their environment. These behaviours are often their way of staying regulated in a world that can be overwhelming.

People with Down syndrome can often remember and understand things better if they can see them, rather than just hear them. This is because visual processing tends to be a relative strength compared to auditory, or sound, processing. Consequently, adding visuals can support memory and learning.

Hearing impairment is very common among people with Down syndrome, and families are encouraged to have a hearing and ear health check done at least once a year. If a student has difficulty with hearing, they may react less or more intensely to sounds than other children, and may have additional difficulty developing clear speech, paying attention, and understanding what is said.

### Fine and Gross Motor Skills

We also must keep in mind a student's gross and fine motor skills which may be delayed in children with Down syndrome. To the extent that they are present, low muscle tone, lax joints, and sensory differences may contribute to motor learning difficulties. Movement difficulties can be a major restriction in participating in school activities, such as walking at the same pace as others, writing their name, or opening their lunch kit independently. And if you really think about it, activities with motor demands are presented to a student constantly throughout the school day. Sometimes it might look like a student is refusing to do an activity, but the activity is really too difficult within the time constraints at hand. We need to recognize where motor challenges are limiting a student's ability to participate, and see if we can add supports or modify the task accordingly.

### Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills enable us to process, analyze, and understand information. Some of these skills that tend to be relatively weaker in Down syndrome include:

- attention processes
- remembering the words you hear and want to use
- reasoning and problem-solving



- abstract thinking
- sequencing and organizing information
- generalizing skills to new situations

These skills may be required at any given moment in the classroom. For example, students are often expected to pay attention and carry out a teacher's instructions. Imagine a student given instructions to, "Take off your coat and shoes, put them in your locker, and then find your seat and get out your homework." Instead, the student goes to the art area and appears to ignore her teacher.

Ignoring or refusing is one interpretation of the behaviour, but think about how we could modify our instructions if we took one of these interpretations instead:

- Perhaps the student's reduced attention span made her easily distracted by the vibrant art area.
- Perhaps her verbal short-term memory and limited vocabulary led her to forget the multi-step instructions after hearing them.
- Maybe she was unable to sequence and organize the task, so initiating and carrying out an appropriate response was overwhelming.
- Or, a combination of the above factors impeded her response, but the student did not have the communication or problem-solving skills to tell her teacher she needed help.

### Communication Skills

It's important to consider the student's level of both understanding and expressing words, symbols, and full messages. Keep in mind that individuals with Down syndrome tend to understand more than they are able to express – so, do not underestimate their understanding, but also do not assume they understand everything you say, either. We'll have much more to say below about supporting the student's communication.

### The Learning Environment

As educators, we need to be aware of opportunities to include students as fully as possible, but also be sensitive to challenging demands that can tax our students' abilities. Each student has finite resources that can be depleted by individual and environmental demands. For each task, consider: what is the ultimate goal, and how can I preserve the student's resources in other areas? Now let's think about the external or environmental factors in the classroom. Proactively modifying environmental factors can help students learn and more fully take part in the classroom.

Below are four tactics to establish a classroom conducive to the success of all students.



### Create a Sensory-Friendly Environment

When it comes to sensory and perceptual challenges in the environment, we want to address anything that can inhibit a student's ability to focus and learn. This can include:

- reducing visual distractions (e.g., clutter, movement)
- reducing auditory distractions (e.g., people talking, chairs scraping the floor, clocks ticking)
- eliminating distracting physical sensations (e.g., itchy clothing tags)
- being attentive to vestibular or proprioceptive input needs (e.g., adding heavy work or movement breaks to calm or alert the sensory system)
- including listening equipment such as FM systems when needed
- considering preferential seating needs as required

Consult with your student's occupational therapist, hearing resource teacher, or other professionals to find out more about their sensory processing needs, and to

strategize ways to make the classroom environment a more sensory-friendly place.

### Implement Appropriate Program Modifications

Program modifications are usually determined when developing your student's individualized education plan (IEP). IEP meetings should involve parents, resource teachers or learning support teachers, classroom teachers, educational assistants, and specialists who know the student well.

Program modifications should enable the student to learn and be successful in school activities, while also keeping in mind the development of skills that are important for friendship, future employability, and independence.

### Utilize Adaptive Equipment

Occupational therapists, physical therapists, and SLPs can help determine what kind of adaptive equipment your student needs to do their best in school. Equipment can support a variety of skills that tend to be challenging to individuals with Down syndrome. For example:

- **Perceptual Skills:** Equipment could include eyeglasses or enlarged text for vision issues, or hearing aids and FM systems for hearing issues.
- **Sensory Skills:** Ball chairs, weighted items, swings, and so on, can provide appropriate sensory input that will increase or decrease activity level as needed.
- **Motor Skills:** Items for fine motor tasks (e.g., pencil grips and supportive seating), and for gross motor tasks (e.g., specialized playground equipment) can ease demands on a student's finite capacity so that more resources are available to tackle a job. For example, if students don't have to spend energy trying to support their posture and sit upright, they'll have more energy left for tasks like talking, writing, and eating.
- **Cognitive and Communication Skills:** Low and high technology options, from visuals of the day's schedule to the use of electronic communication devices, can build predictability, support understanding, and encourage expression throughout the day.

Let's further explore the use of visuals. You may think a student no longer needs visuals once they are talking. However, visuals can further enrich a student's expression of their ideas, as well as support their ability to understand and remember incoming information. Keep in mind that students with Down syndrome tend to have relatively weaker memory for what they hear, so we can capitalize on the relative strength of their visual processing skills to support what we say to them. Plus, we all use visuals every day to learn and remember things, from diagrams and written notes, to our cell phones and planners!

Visuals include anything the student can see that is meaningful and supports understanding, such as:

- demonstrations and videos
- objects
- photos
- picture symbols or drawings
- writing

Visuals, however, are not one size fits all. We must consider a student's ability to see and make sense of items when deciding how big/small, complex/simple, and abstract/concrete materials must be.

As tasks or lessons become more advanced, you might start to incorporate more complex visual learning tools, such as peer or video modeling, social scripting, and social stories. If these tools are new to you, speak with a colleague or SLP who has training and experience in implementing these strategies.

When you create and use visuals for your students with Down syndrome, you may find that they are useful for the whole class! First-then boards, choice boards, visual schedules, and task breakdowns can make your classroom run more smoothly for all learners.

Some students have augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) as part of their support plan. Higher-tech AAC devices can support a student's expression if their speech is difficult to understand or if they struggle to remember words and build sentences. This can reduce current frustration while continuing progress in overall communication, language and concept development.

You might have seen students with an iPad equipped with a communication app such as Touch Chat, LAMP, Proloquo2Go, or a PODD system. Use it! Request brief training from your school's SLP, and then give it a shot with your student. Find out who is in charge of programming the vocabulary and suggest adding key words or concepts to facilitate class participation. Your input and ideas about what language is relevant in the classroom is vital to implementing practical communication supports.

The most common augmentative communication system for children with Down syndrome is a total communication approach. Total communication combines all communication methods at a student's disposal. Use speech, sign language, gestures, pictures, or technology, depending on what supports communication in a given situation. This can help students to express their ideas more clearly and efficiently. As speech develops and children learn new spoken words, speech may gradually overtake sign language or AAC, or people may use their AAC to repair communication breakdowns, support literacy growth, or express more complex ideas than they might be able to verbally. Students with communication impairments deserve to access a communication method that works for them now, so we recommend not

waiting to introduce AAC if your student is struggling to communicate clearly.

### Provide Personal Support

Teachers, educational assistants, therapists, and peers who interact with students with Down syndrome all have an important role to play in facilitating communication. Below are some helpful guidelines to optimize exchanges with the student.

### Supporting Comprehension

Communicate in ways that facilitate the student's comprehension. The following strategies are based on the relative challenges more commonly seen in Down syndrome with regards to attention, verbal short-term memory, abstract thinking, and organization:

- Keep your sentences short and simple, delivering one key piece of information at a time. Emphasize key words with your voice too.
- Speak at a slower pace – but keep it natural.
- Use concrete, specific words.
- Augment what you say with visual supports, demonstrations, and hands-on activities.
- Repeat, repeat, repeat! Pre-teach new concepts, repeat key points often, and review regularly.

Monitor your student to determine whether you need to adjust your delivery style. The student likely understood what you said if they respond meaningfully, accurately, and consistently to similar directions or requests. Responding incorrectly, repeating the last thing you said, smiling and nodding, or ignoring you are signs that your message didn't go through, and you need to adjust your delivery.

### Supporting Expression

We also need to help our students express their needs and ideas in the classroom. The following ideas may help:

- The #1 tip is to WAIT! Give time for students with Down syndrome to process their responses. Challenge yourself to count to ten before talking again, and encourage classmates and other staff to do the same.

- When a student doesn't answer your question right away, it can be tempting to ask it again, or shower them with more questions. Think about only asking questions your student can answer, and keep in mind that some types of questions are easier than others. For example, when and why questions tend to be more abstract than concrete who, what, and where questions. The easiest type of question to answer is a choice question; students just need to recognize and repeat their choice using the words you just modeled.
- If the student makes errors in their sentences, simply repeat their sentence with emphasis on corrections – you are modeling the correct way to say it, but not forcing them to repeat you.
- If there is a routine activity that involves using similar words or phrases every time, such as show and tell or calendar, consider providing visual supports to help your student express more complete ideas. You might write down a sentence or a script (with or without picture symbols) to remind them of what to say when it's their turn.
- Finally, it is very important to positively reinforce any attempts to communicate and take part meaningfully. Reward effort, not accuracy, with attention and praise, and acknowledge and follow through on requests when possible.

Sometimes you may struggle to understand your student's speech. We must appreciate how frustrating this can be for the student with Down syndrome. Show that you feel relaxed, interested in what they are saying, and will try to work with them to figure it out.

You will learn which strategies work best for your individual student to repair unintelligible words. Try politely asking the student to:

- slowly repeat their message
- show you or take you to what they mean
- tell you the first sound or letter
- try another mode, such as AAC, sign language, gesture, or writing

- answer a yes/no question or choice question to narrow down the topic

If all else fails, respectfully ask if they want to try again later and consider asking someone who might have more context clues to share. Make sure to honour that agreement!

### Supporting Social Communication

Social communication, or pragmatics, involves the many nuanced skills required to keep up a conversation, such as making eye contact, reading body language, taking turns talking, maintaining a topic, and asking partner-directed questions. While these unspoken rules tend to be absorbed automatically, students with Down syndrome likely need us to teach these hidden rules explicitly and clearly.

Pragmatics are one of the most important aspects of communication for success in school and with peers. Even if a student has limited expressive language, strong social communication can help students with important social skills such as taking turns, waiting in line, sharing toys, greeting friends and staff, and expressing interest in other people. As children grow from elementary school to adulthood, pragmatics are the skills that evolve into the characteristics you want to see in a good employee, friend, or partner.

School personnel are in a particularly good position to teach and reinforce pragmatic skills; compared to parents, you get to see children in a rich social environment and support daily interaction with classmates and staff. Effectively teaching and supporting positive social skills is one of the most important things you can do for a child in your school.

You can do this through:

- Modeling: Show exactly what to do in a given situation.
- Scripts: Create scripts for common interactions to teach the student what they can say and do.

- Role Play: Practice and rehearse scripts in advance.
- Visuals: Include visuals of rules and scripts to support the student's understanding, learning, and memory.
- Prompting: Cue the student to use the skills they have practiced in the appropriate moment.
- Feedback: Provide specific feedback immediately after the student's attempt; focus on what they did well to increase the chances they will do it again in the future.

Families rightly have high expectations when it comes to classroom inclusion, and most teachers share these ideals. And yet, it is difficult for a teacher to be all things to all students; we must be on guard against the threat of burnout. It takes the whole team, including parents, teachers, educational assistants, and school administrators, to create a classroom environment that plays to students' strengths and supports them through challenges, to set them up for success – this school year and far beyond!



# Stories of Allyship in the School Community

Did you know that bullying stops within 10 seconds when peers intervene or do not support the bullying behavior? Just 10 seconds. That gives students a considerable amount of influence when it comes to preventing the trauma caused by bullying. Of course, speaking up when another child is being bullied is not easy, and the responsibility is primarily on the adults to help mitigate and resolve the conflict.

In 85% of cases, bullying takes place in front of witnesses. That leaves a large opportunity to reduce bullying by encouraging a strategic whole school approach, where the entire school community is educated on how to identify bullying and encouraged to intervene when bullying occurs.

It takes courage and thoughtfulness to practice allyship in day-to-day life. We spoke to former and current school community members about what it means to be a true ally to other students and asked them to share their own experiences.

“

When I was at school, some kids made me feel that I was not included with any sports and I felt very excluded from them a lot. If I was included with them, that would make me very happy to play soccer at recess with them. When I was left out, I would talk to an adult and that would make me feel better. I know that everyone gets scared sometimes, but there is no need to be scared or anxious about school because school is about having fun and having good friends and good teachers and learning.

**Paul Sawka**  
Self-advocate, Graduate,  
and CDSS Awareness Leader

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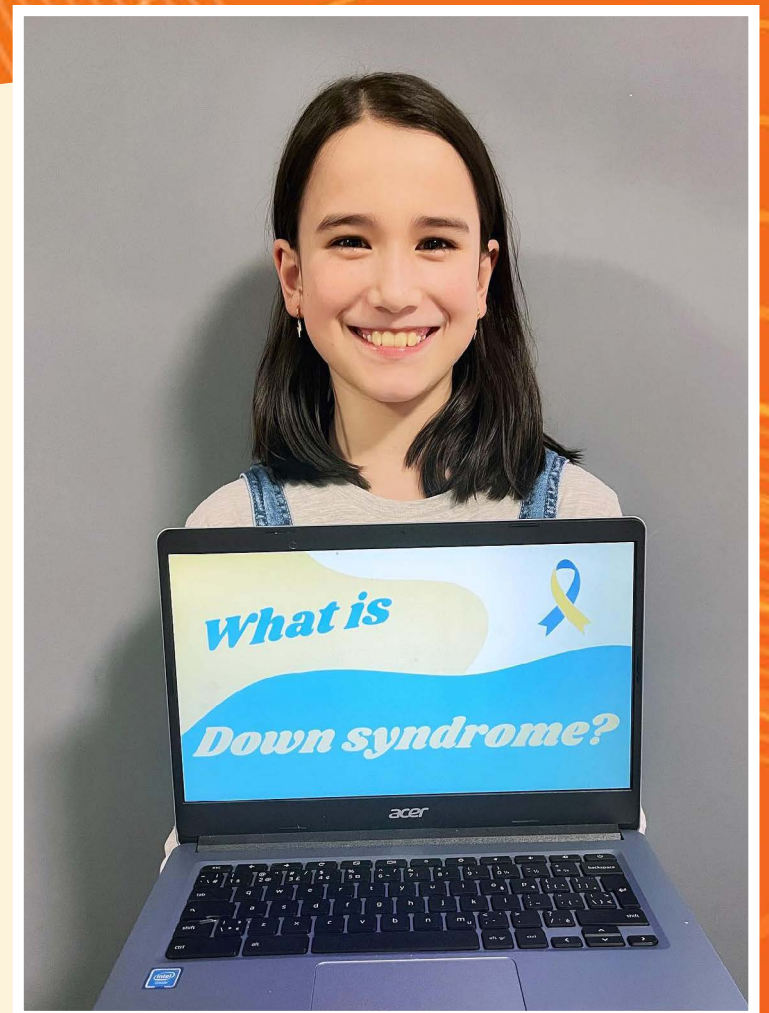
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My friends and I gave a presentation on World Down Syndrome Day, and we talked about what Down syndrome is and why we celebrate WDS. I wanted to share with everyone what it was like to have a sister with Down syndrome, and that it's important to include everyone and never treat people differently for being different. It doesn't matter what a person's ability is; you can always be friends with someone regardless of whether they're disabled or not. My three best friends helped me put the presentation together. I asked the class if they knew what DS was at the beginning of the presentation, and a lot of people knew that it had something to do with chromosomes and that it was a disability, but I think my presentation taught the class more than just the information that can be found online. I told everyone that having a sister with Down syndrome probably makes me feel more comfortable around people with disabilities, but everyone should feel comfortable around disabled people because they're humans too and everyone is different in their own way.

If you see someone who is alone, you should invite them to play or hangout with you; that includes people who are excluded because they are different or have a disability. If you have a disability class in your school, you can help out in their classroom or invite those kids to play with you at recess. You can also do a research project or a presentation about inclusion and how to be more inclusive towards everyone. And if you have a sibling with a disability, you can make a presentation to tell the class about their disability to raise awareness. But I think it starts with being inclusive and kind towards everyone; whether they have a disability or not.

**Maya Hatamochi**  
Student and Sister to Emalee, who has Down syndrome

”





“

When Emalee was born and she was diagnosed with Down syndrome, my immediate thought was, “What have I done to Maya? How will this impact her? Will she think of her sister and the disability as a burden? What kind of sibling relationship will they have?” If only my scared, anxious self from 7 years ago could see us now.

I was informed by the school that Maya spoke about the World Down Syndrome Day celebration over the intercom. She told me that her classmates clapped for her when she returned to the classroom. Emalee (her sister with Down syndrome) told me that she was so proud to hear her sister on the speaker.

Maya also presented to her class information about Down syndrome that she and her 3 best friends researched and put together. She practiced her presentation for me and told me how having a sister with Down syndrome has taught her about inclusion and the disability community. She told me that she feels so proud when she sees Emalee working hard at therapy or being brave at the hospital. If there’s one thing that I know now, Down syndrome has only changed us for the better. Learning about the disability community has only changed us to try and be better. And inclusion benefits EVERYONE.

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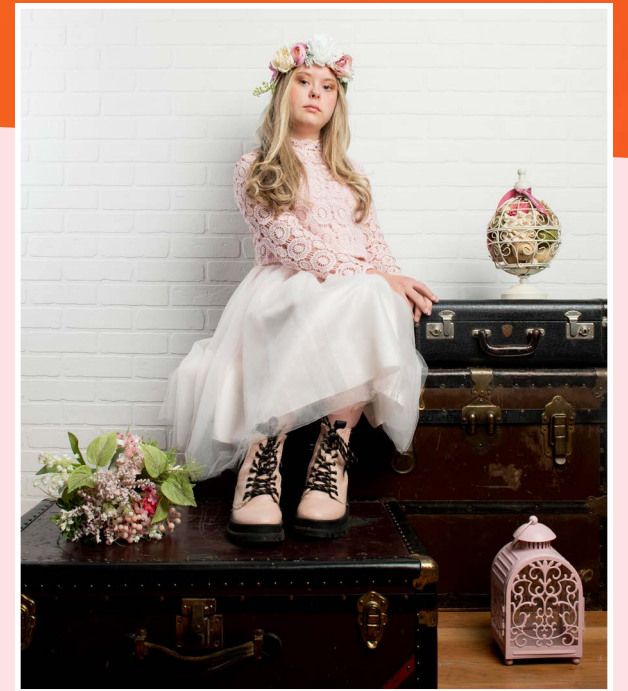
**Nao Hatamochi**  
Maya and Emalee’s Mother  
and Advocate (@RightNao)

“

I feel most included at school when I talk to my EA Ms. Heleno and my teachers. They are all so nice to me and fun. I also enjoy lunch time activities in our gym, our school dances, and spring formal. If someone was being bullied at school, I would tell an adult right away to let them help the person being bullied. Our school goes up to grade 12 so I’m more comfortable asking an adult to help. We are very lucky to not have bullying in our school, it is very small. My message for anyone nervous about going back to school is take some deep breaths. Let your light shine from your heart and soul. Be confident. It’s not a bad thing to be alone sometimes. I like to take time away from group activities to quiet my mind. Sometimes it is nice to get a brain break from all the excitement or noise. Don’t try too hard to fit in. You just need to be you and you will find your friends.

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**Annika Van Vilet**  
Self-Advocate and Student

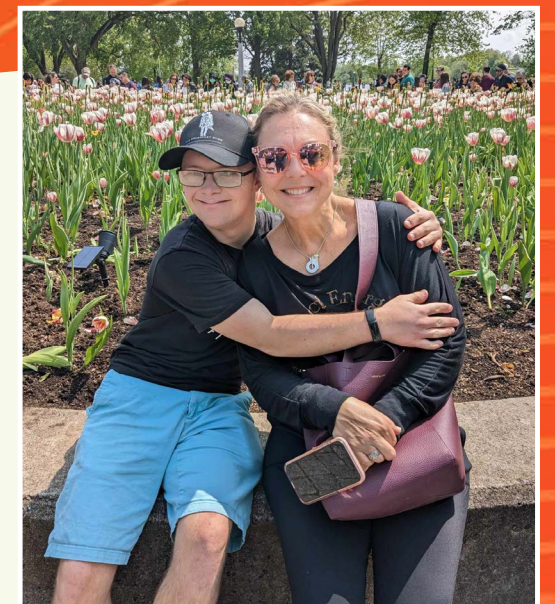


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Fostering an inclusive environment is making everyone feel included naturally, providing a classroom where everyone is welcome and is a safe space for all. It is heartwarming to see how naturally this occurs in the early years but as children mature and notice differences, some students are left behind. The most meaningful examples of true inclusion occur outside the classroom; during lunch time, recess, field trips etc. I have witnessed this occurring many times: where a friend will help another who may be struggling with their zipper, invite the kid in their class who always spills their drink at lunchtime to sit with them on the bus or at lunch, or invite them to play at recess. I find when children are taught to be inclusive in the classroom it occurs more naturally during unstructured time. Many teachers have lessons on diversity, equality, and equity with great follow up activities and discussions. Group work and the ability to work together with different styles of learning promotes acceptance. Teaching about community and the right to belong is important. We may not always remember what someone said or did for us; but we always remember how they made us feel. This is true inclusion.

”

**Tara Cornelisse**  
EA and Parent of an Adult with Down syndrome





One way any member of the school community can help to foster an inclusive environment is by sharing *Learning Together in the School Community*, a trusted resource for educators to use as they welcome students with Down syndrome into their classroom. It not only provides information about Down syndrome and how to speak with a student with a disability, but it also has information on creating accessible lesson plans, making classrooms more inclusive, educating other students about Down syndrome, and suggested activities for teaching inclusion in the classroom. You can download and print your own copy from the CDSS website: [CDSS.ca/Resources/Education](http://CDSS.ca/Resources/Education).

Creating an anti-bullying pledge at school (and even at home) is a great way to reinforce anti-bullying beliefs and behaviors as well. Saying a pledge out loud in front of peers encourages accountability. Here are some common examples of anti-bullying pledge statements:

- I am a student at this school and I deserve to enjoy being here.
- I will do my part to make school enjoyable for everyone.
- I promise to be kind to others.
- I promise to care when I see someone is being hurt.
- I promise to do my best to include others.
- I promise to not be mean to others.

When students have a positive experience learning in a safe, inclusive environment, it has a long-lasting impact. They can build their confidence and feel empowered to take risks and demonstrate their talents, like young author Cara Komukai who was motivated to write a children's book about her teacher's mischievous dogs, *Rainbow Puppy Daycare*, and now shares the story with younger students:

“

“Reggie and Olive are the puppies of my teacher (aka my ‘boss’) Mr. Larocque. When I was taking classes online, we saw his dogs chewing the floor, the couch, and the walls! I wrote the story because I wanted the puppies to be nice and to listen to their owner. I feel happy. I am proud of myself because I can be an author. I can share my book and help other people. I was happy to show my old teachers and EAs my book. I felt good when my friends saw me at recess and we all joined together to play hopscotch and skipping and zipline.

”

**Cara Komukai**  
Self-Advocate, Student, and Author



A supportive, inclusive environment gives every student the chance they deserve to focus on learning and building friendships. It will take the commitment of the entire school community - parents, teachers, EAs, volunteers, administrative staff, support staff, other students - to

make it a reality. Luckily, we have amazing self-advocates and allies already in our community who are spreading awareness and taking action every day to make it happen. Thank you to everyone who shared their stories of allyship and inclusion here.

NEW

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Canadian  
Down Syndrome  
Society



# Classmates:

## Building Friendships at School

By Adelle Purdham

One of the things I worried about most when my family of five moved cities was the friendships, connections, and community we'd be leaving behind – especially for ten-year-old Elyse, who has Down syndrome and for whom verbal communication is more difficult.

Elyse had attended school with the same group of kids from the time she was three and a half years old, and those kids knew her, understood her, and loved her. Elyse's classmates included her; she was invited to their birthday parties and had friends on the playground at recess time, and kids who I knew looked out for her. I spent time in her school most years talking to the students about Down syndrome (with the help of Special Olympian Emily Boycott), and the school community embraced not only Elyse, but celebrating World Down Syndrome Day, too.

In regular meetings scheduled with her teachers, I asked about Elyse's playmates. I requested to receive notes in her daily communication book when she connected with peers. Over the years, I developed a rapport with Elyse's educational assistants, and they sent me videos and photos of her playing authentically with the other kids at recess, and participating in group activities during class time. Elyse

didn't often tell me about her friends while at home, but through the parents of those kids, I knew she was forming strong connections. When Elyse's big sister Ariel was invited to a birthday party, Elyse, who is a year younger, was invited too. As a party favour, the girls received matching t-shirts, which they coordinated wearing to school the next day. Elyse belonged.

What would happen when we moved?

### Challenges and Preconceived Notions

I don't want to paint a perfect picture of how things were before our move, because Elyse faced real challenges in developing friendships that could be fostered outside of the school environment. On one occasion, I invited her enthusiastic school friend over to play, and Elyse didn't show the slightest bit of interest in reciprocating or engaging with this friend once she arrived. The experience of hosting seemed too overwhelming.

This is where siblings, or other friends, can be helpers. Ariel got involved and stepped in to 'host' Elyse's friend and make her feel welcome. In the end, I took all the girls to the park, and they had a great time each doing their own thing

and occasionally playing together. From that experience, I realized I had to adjust my own expectations about what Elyse could manage as a friend, and also what friendship and a playdate 'should' look like. Elyse didn't yet possess hosting skills, and so having her sister as a buffer was helpful.

Later, the parents told me the friend had a great time. Even though the play date was more side-by-side parallel play than direct interaction, or playing together, this friend knew Elyse and what she was signing up for.

### Inclusion Begins at Home

When I say friendship, what I'm really talking about is building relationships and inclusion. I attended a session on inclusion as a delegate at the World Down Syndrome Congress in Chennai, India in 2014, and the speaker, a professor of psychology, stated plainly that inclusion begins in the home and moves outward. The ability to build friendships works this way, too.

Early on, I began thinking about the ways we as a family include Elyse. How do we play in a way that brings us all together? What activities include our youngest and most reticent family members? What draws each of us in, and holds us there?

For our family, it's kicking around a soccer ball, or going swimming, or for a hike or dog walk, or to the park, or telling campfire stories in summertime, or reading a book. We play card games like Uno, Hungry Hippo, Jenga, and Candy Land. As the adults, we model social interactions such as turn taking and communicating effectively when playing these games, to teach and reinforce social skills in a fun way. These social skills are necessary to be a good friend. We extend that play into our wider family circle by going to cottages with cousins, spending time together over family meals, and enjoying outings with grandparents.

Elyse naturally has a wonderful sense of humour, and oftentimes it is other kids who see that on their own. We encourage this gift with our laughter at every opportunity.



### Create Opportunities

When we moved, Elyse had to build new friendships. A few weeks after beginning at the new school, I looked across the dinner table at my girls and nervously asked, "So... how's it going? Who do you talk to you at school, Elyse?"

Elyse wasn't giving me much in the way of a response, and Ariel, who happened to be in a split-class with Elyse, could see through my thinly-veiled questions. "Mom, don't worry!" she said, "Elyse is a star. Everybody wants to be her friend and knows who she is."

A month later, in an attempt to get to know the new school community, we invited her entire grade four class to the park behind our house for Elyse's birthday. I created a homemade flyer with a picture of Elyse, with her help, and she handed one out to each classmate. My heart filled to bursting when nearly every kid in her class showed up with their families.

The party was simple: a playground for the kids to access and a table set up with pizza, cake, juice boxes, and a few snacks. The kids had a blast. I got to see Elyse's budding friendships with her peers firsthand, as they chased each

other around the playground. In this case, I had the caregivers to thank who made the effort to show up with their families for our daughter. Sometimes, all that people need to get involved, to be a friend, is the opportunity to do so.

### Tips for Building Friendships at School

- Get to know the school community. The adults in your child's school, including teachers, educational assistants, and support staff, can provide insights into your child's peer relationships, and are essential when it comes to creating an inclusive school environment conducive to friendship. Maintain good communication between school and home with regular meetings, a communication book, and a sharing app, such as Padlet.
- Build social skills through family activities that involve turn taking and communication.
- Educate. When students have an understanding of Down syndrome and how it impacts a child (e.g. that the muscles in Elyse's mouth are weaker, and that's

why it's harder for her to talk clearly), they are more likely to show empathy, and less likely to act out of fear or apathy.

- Focus on inclusion. Meaningful inclusion isn't simply about being in the same space, it's about engaging in activities with others where each person's needs are able to be met. If a child is constantly spending time outside of the classroom away from their peers, how are they supposed to build friendships?
- Lean into your child's strengths. What are they naturally interested in or good at? Sign them up for extracurricular activities that give them the opportunity to practice social skills and build friendships outside of the classroom as well.

- Follow the child's lead and think outside the box. Set up playdates outside the school with classmates you know your child has a connection with, and choose an activity that your child loves (e.g. swimming, playing at the park or playground, going to a movie, making art).
- Trust your child and your community. Give others the information, and then let them rise to the occasion of meeting your child where they are at, and create opportunities for them to do so.

When you look back at your own school days, what do you remember most? Chances are, it's not the lessons learned in the classroom but the friends you made along the way. With a little help, the same will be true for your child with Down syndrome.



## Season 8 Topics

elopement: reigning in a runner  
helping your loved one grieve  
Down syndrome + autism  
Down syndrome + epilepsy  
financial supports for adults  
*and much more!*

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Hosted by Marla Folden, SLP  
+ Hina Mahmood, OT

**The LowDOWN**  
A Down Syndrome Podcast



# Anti-Anxiety Affirmations and Advice for Parents



By Courtney Cassel

Every parent sends their child to school with the hope that they will make friends and enjoy their classroom experience, but along with the excitement of a new beginning like sending your child to school for the first time lurks another emotion - anxiety.

**You are not alone.** Concerns about socialization have become especially heightened in the post-pandemic era, now that many young children were not able to attend daycare or preschool and others missed critical high school years. It's only natural to feel anxious and ask questions like, "What if my child gets bullied? What if they don't make any friends? What if they don't fit in?"

*"42% of youth with a disability have experienced bullying at school because of their condition." Canadian Survey on Disability, 2017*

As a parent of a child with a disability, there are additional unknown elements that will impact your child's journey that are out of your control - like staff attitudes, student behaviour, and school inclusionary practices. So what can parents do to help prepare their child for socializing in the school environment? A Bullying Prevention Plan can be used as a compliment to your child's journey at

school. It involves working through specific scenarios and interventions with your child and recording them so they can be shared with their teacher and the school community.

Useful strategies to address bullying at school specifically for children with disabilities include providing general information to classmates about the disability and what kind of support your child requires, classroom buddy systems, team-based learning activities, frequent rotation of student groups, social-emotional learning activities, and rewarding positive, helpful behaviour.

*"One high school created a weekly lunch program where students with and without special healthcare needs sat and ate lunch together. Several senior students led the group, and invited their friends to join. All kinds of students participated. The students got to know each other through question and answer periods and discussions over lunch. They discovered things they had in common and formed friendships. A group of them went to the prom together." - StopBullying.gov*

Programs like these must be implemented at the school administration level and there are limitations to the influence a parent - or even a teacher - can have on day-to-

day classroom practices. Every situation will be different depending on a wide variety of factors, including school budgets, staffing, class sizes, attitudes, and policies.

Unicef states that building your child's self confidence is one of the best ways to help prevent bullying before it happens. If your child has had a bad day - for whatever reason - instill them with confidence and reassurance by using these positive affirmations:

1. You are a good person.
2. You have not done anything wrong.
3. I believe you.
4. Your feelings matter.
5. You are safe now.
6. It is not up to you to stop the bullying.
7. You deserve respect.
8. You are not alone.
9. I am here for you.
10. You are strong and brave.

FamilyLives.org recommends these non-verbal aids for communicating with your child openly about their day at school:

- Use visual prompts such as pictures, cue cards, or communication boards
- Ask your child to draw pictures of what happened during their day
- Use a diary system or a question box that you can review together
- Use scales or a colour system to help your child understand and rate how they are feeling throughout the day
- Use pictures of faces showing different expressions to explain feeling

Anti-anxiety affirmations can also be helpful for parents who are navigating the emotional experience of separation anxiety or having their child bullied. It can seem impossible at times to quell the protective parenting reflex. Repeat these phrases when you need help controlling your anger or sadness in order to provide a calming presence for your child:

1. I am strong.
2. I am patient.
3. This is hard, but that is okay.

4. I have everything I need to handle this.
5. I am raising an amazing child.
6. I am not alone.
7. I am doing the best I can and that is enough.
8. I am full of love and understanding.
9. I choose kindness.
10. I am a powerful advocate for my child.

**It is not up to you and your child to prevent bullying.** It is the responsibility of everyone in the school community to ensure a safe, enjoyable learning environment. Speak to your child's teacher if your child experiences a conflict or a socialization issue; there may be intervention strategies to explore.

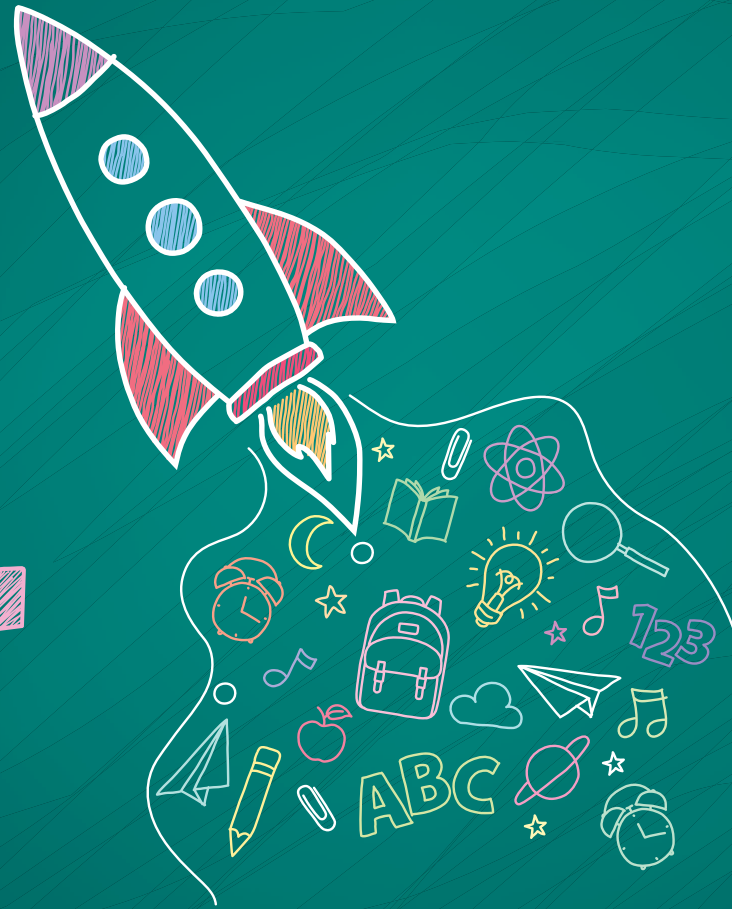
If your child is being bullied, there are also many trusted support programs and networks in Canada to help provide guidance, comfort, and support. Hundreds of people with Down syndrome and caregivers also visit the CDSS Mental Health Resource Hub every year to help manage depression, anxiety, loneliness, and other issues commonly associated with bullying.

## Resources for Students

- BullyingCanada's Lifeline: Bullied Youth Support Network and Workshops
- The Canadian Safe School Network Resources
- Rick Hansen Foundation Kindness Prevents Bullying Resources
- Canadian Red Cross Beyond the Hurt Program
- Canadian Down Syndrome Society Mental Health Resource Hub



# BACK TO SCHOOL Q & A



## Are you nervous to go back to school?

**Annika (South Surrey, BC):** No, I'm not nervous to go back to school. I love my teachers and my school. My Dad founded my school and it's very small with lots of nice and good people there.

**Rockford (Port Alberni, BC):** Yes, I am nervous.

**Hope (Regina, SK):** No, I wanna see my teacher and my friends.

**Olivia (Grand Bay-Westfield, NB):** I'm a little nervous to go back to school. I'll be in Grade 10 this year and there will be new people in my classes that I don't know.

**Sarah S. (Burnaby, BC):** No, I'm not nervous.

**Ella (Vancouver, BC):** No.

## When school makes you nervous, what do you do to calm down?

**Ella:** I play a game.

**Annika:** If I ever get nervous, I take some deep breaths and it really helps me to calm down. I do that before a big fashion show also, it's a great way to feel better.

**Sarah S.:** I take deep breaths.

**Kendal (Regina, SK):** I breathe in through my nose and out through my mouth. I can go for a walk. I talk to my friends.

**Sarah (Ottawa, ON):** When school makes me nervous, I take a deep breath and say "I'm Sarah! I'm awesome and I can do this! I don't give up!"

## What subject are you most excited to learn?

**Olivia:** My favourite subject is art because I like colouring and being creative.

**Sarah S.:** My favourite is English.

**Rockford:** Math.

**Annika:** I'm most excited to learn about art and what's for hot lunch.

**Ella:** I like science.

**Kendal:** I like Math the best, when Mrs. Shaw teaches me.

## What is your favourite part of your school day?

**Rockford:** I like seeing my classmates and teacher.

**Ella:** My favourite is dancing!

**Annika:** My favourite part of a school day is spending time with my nice teachers, friends and my EA. I really like when school ends and I can go home and relax.

**Sarah S.:** I love seeing my classmates!

**Sarah:** The best part of my school day is lunch time because I get to hang out with all of my friends.

## What will you miss most about the summer?

**Hope:** Time with my family and going to the cabin.

**Annika:** I will miss summer because I can't sleep in and do fun things every day when I'm back to school.

**Sarah S.:** I'll miss vacations and seeing my friend Rae.

**Rockford:** Time with my family.

**Ella:** I will miss the weather.

**Kendal:** I will miss my mom and my pool, and s'mores and staying up late.

## What is your goal at school this year?

**Ella:** I want to play more soccer and get better at it.

**Hope:** Work harder, get ready for high school, do my work all by myself.

**Rockford:** I want to learn more.

**Olivia:** My goals for this year are to get good marks and play on the Unified Basketball team again.

**Sarah S.:** To work hard!

**Annika:** My goal at school this year in grade 10 is to make a new friend or two and to keep working hard to get good grades. School is hard sometimes, but I love it.

**Sarah:** My goal at school this year is to pass all my classes. Only 5 credits left till I graduate with my high school certificate!

## DSRF Launches Online Learning Portal and Community

DSRF has just opened the virtual doors to the Down Syndrome Academy, a first-of-its-kind online education portal offering self-paced multimedia courses on a variety of topics related to Down syndrome.

Each course guides users on a learning journey through comprehensive video, audio, and written resources to help them better understand and support the person in their life with Down syndrome. The courses are intended for parents, caregivers, professionals, and anyone aiming to gain a better understanding of Down syndrome.

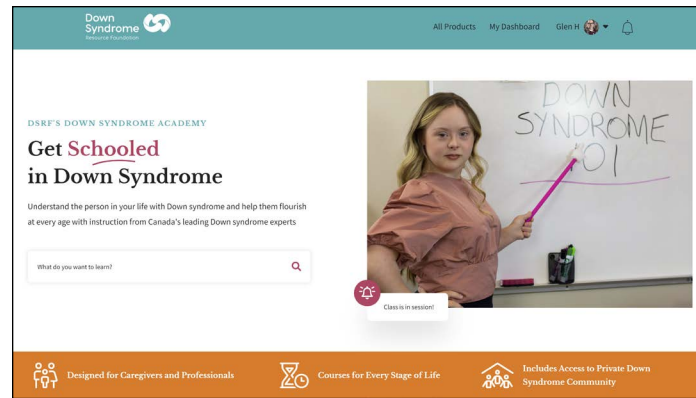
As a UK-based educational assistant who supports a 6-year-old girl with Down syndrome recently shared, “The information DSRF provide is absolutely first class. The videos are a fantastic resource for me. The podcasts are brilliant; I love listening to them. In the 18 months I have been supporting this girl, she has made remarkable progress and this is based on the quality information DSRF provides.” Through Down Syndrome Academy, this information is now more accessible than ever.

## DSRF Student Aaron Waddingham Wins Best Actor Award

DSRF student Aaron Waddingham has been honoured with a Leo Award for BEST PERFORMANCE MALE SHORT DRAMA for his role in the short film Chicken. The Leo Awards honour excellence in BC film and television.

Chicken is a short film directed by Lucy McNulty and Emma Pollard. It is written by McNulty and stars Waddingham and McNulty, along with other actors with disabilities. The film tells the story of a down-on-her-luck, recently-single sister. She is forced to move back into her childhood home where she reconnects with her brother, who has Down syndrome.

Aaron’s mother Sue Robins says, “We will never forget that DSRF were early supporters of Chicken... and of course of Aaron too. Danielle taught him to be a good reader, Susan has helped with his feelings stuff, Cassie has helped run his

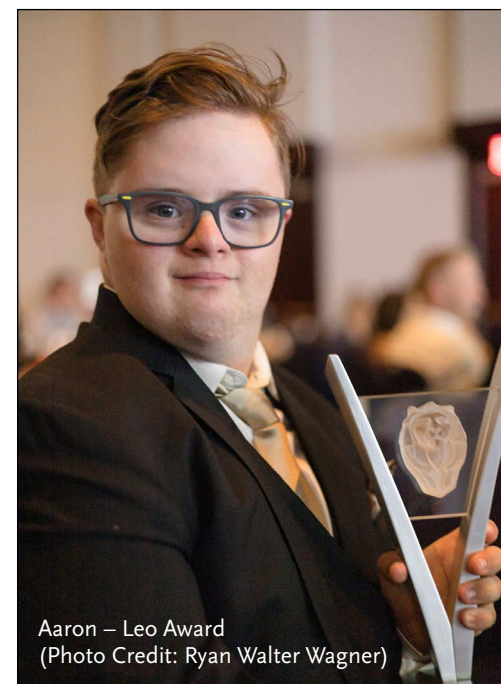


The portal has launched with three courses. Down Syndrome 101 is an introductory primer to Down syndrome, and is available for free to all users. Additional courses on mental wellness, relationships and sexuality, and supporting learners with Down syndrome are available for purchase or through subscription. More courses will be added in the coming months.

The portal also includes a social component, the DSRF Circle of Support. This community functions like a private Facebook group, allowing users to interact and learn from one another and engage directly with DSRF.

All families registered for DSRF educational programs and therapy services, as well as our Triple-21 monthly donors, will receive caregiver subscriptions, allowing them to benefit from everything available on the platform. Those outside of DSRF can purchase individual courses or full subscriptions.

For more information, visit [DSRF.org/Academy](https://www.dsrf.org/Academy).



Aaron – Leo Award  
(Photo Credit: Ryan Walter Wagner)

lines for auditions, Liv has led theatre group... well, I could go on and on. EVERYBODY at DSRF has been supportive in making Aaron the young man he is today.”

All of us at DSRF are so proud of you Aaron, and we are proud to support Chicken! Congratulations and well done!

## \$250,000 Raised at Run Up for Down Syndrome

In early June, 923 runners representing 63 teams gathered at Burnaby’s Swangard Stadium for Run Up for Down Syndrome. With more than 1,250 donors contributing, participants collectively raised over \$250,000 for the programs and services of the Down Syndrome Resource Foundation - the second highest total in the event’s 28-year history.

Along with the runners, the success of the event was due in large part to our generous event sponsors, including presenting sponsor Upper Canada Forest Products, LiUNA Western Canada, CTV, Save On Foods, Prospera Credit Union, BC Maritime Employers Association, Mott Electric, Return-It Express, Allwest Insurance, Vancity, Spirit Ridge Resort, KPMG, the Vancouver Canadians, Outback Team Building and Training, and the City of Burnaby. Special thanks to our incredible volunteer team including those from SFU Hockey, Starbucks, Telus, and RBC, as well as emcee John Crosby and emcee assistants Jodi Klukas and Carina Hei.



Down Syndrome  
Resource Foundation



## FRIENDS OF DSRF

Thank you to every runner, donor, sponsor, and volunteer who contributed to the success of Run Up for Down Syndrome. In particular, thank you to presenting sponsor Upper Canada Forest Products and top fundraisers Geoff Gates, Bill and Trudene Longman, and George Klukas. A heartfelt thank you as well to Macquarie Group, which generously matched the \$32,000+ raised by Geoff Gates.

Thank you to Arvind Dhillon and Family, who have generously donated \$13,000 and committed to another \$13,000 gift in 2024 to provide new laptops, tablets, and accessories for the use of adult students in DSRF’s group educational programs, as well as students of all ages engaged in our individual therapy and educational services. You are helping to ensure that every student with Down syndrome has the tools and resources they need to thrive academically, socially, and professionally.

Longtime supporter the Ames Family Foundation has generously gifted \$15,000 for our Employment Support Service. Thank you to the Foundation for helping adults with Down syndrome find and maintain meaningful employment.

The Kiwanis Club of Vancouver has donated \$2,500 in support of our Summer Camps for youth and young adults with Down syndrome. The campers had a wonderful time; thank you for helping to make it possible.

The John Hardie Mitchell Family Foundation has provided \$3,000 in support of our educational programs and therapy services. Thank you for helping people of all ages with Down syndrome to flourish.

## UPCOMING AT DSRF

Up the Down Market Vancouver: *October 11, 2023*

Up the Down Market Calgary: *October 19, 2023*

Up the Down Market Toronto: *November 2, 2023*

DSRF’s Magical Morning: *December 15, 2023*

## FIND US / TAG US

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[DSRF.org](https://www.dsrf.org)

# CDSS SPOTLIGHT

## Something Exciting is Brewing at CDSS...

Community members gathered for a coffee tasting this past summer to sample and select just the right flavours for the new 21 Reasons: Extra Special Blend. Coming to a coffee mug near you this fall! The new roast will be available for ordering in September, with a percentage of proceeds supporting life-changing programs for Canadians with Down syndrome. Visit [CDSS.ca/21-Reasons](http://CDSS.ca/21-Reasons) to learn more.



## Down Syndrome WALK

107% OF OUR GOAL REACHED  
**THANK YOU!**



### What's New at CDSS?

- We would like to officially welcome two new board members, Peter Wright and Elizabeth Kennedy! We are excited to have your expertise and experience strengthen our Board of Directors. We would also like to extend a congratulations to our new Board Chair, Jennifer Crowson who brings over 24 years of experience working in the social services, non-profit, and government sectors.
- The new 21 Welcomes is now available in our New Parents Resource Hub! Inside this trusted resource for new parents you'll find new perspectives, self-advocate stories, and updated information. Download, save, and share your own copy from [CDSS.ca/Resources/New-Parents/](http://CDSS.ca/Resources/New-Parents/).
- We are working with other organizations to provide the resources and information people with Down syndrome need to live a healthy life into their senior years. Look for the release of the new Today and Tomorrow: A Guide to Aging with Down Syndrome coming this October!



Canadian Down Syndrome Society | Société canadienne de la trisomie 21



## YOU'RE INVITED TO THE CHICKEN PREMIERE!

You're invited to the Official Premiere of the award-winning short film Chicken! Starring self-advocate Aaron Waddingham and writer and co-director Lucy McNulty, the film is an emotional journey into the world of adult sibling relationships. It all takes place on the CDSS Facebook page at 7:00pm EST Thursday, October 26th.

## JOIN THE MULTILINGUAL CAREGIVER NETWORK

Help us welcome people into the Down syndrome community by joining our new Multilingual Caregiver Network. With over 15 languages represented already, parents across the country are connecting and sharing experiences, knowledge, and reassurance with those who are beginning their journey in Canada or with their new baby with Down syndrome. If you are a parent of a child with Down syndrome who speaks a language other than English and would like to join, please email [SarahC@CDSS.ca](mailto:SarahC@CDSS.ca).

### Upcoming Dates and Events

**Disability Employment Awareness Month**  
October

**Learning Disabilities Awareness Month**  
October

**Canadian Down Syndrome Week**  
October 22 - 28

**Official Chicken Film Premiere**  
October 26

## JOIN OUR COMMUNITY

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Canadian Down Syndrome Society

Société canadienne de la trisomie 21



THE DOWN SYNDROME RESOURCE FOUNDATION PRESENTS

# CROSS ROAD

Where Down Syndrome  
Meets Autism



## FEATURING

Eva Toth  
Faith Gazzola  
Nikhil Ekanayake

PRODUCED BY GLEN HOOS | DIRECTED BY MATTHEW HOOS | VISUAL EFFECTS BY JOSEPH WOLOSHYN

COMING FALL 2023  
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