



5 Easy Strategies For Including Someone with Down Syndrome

The Ups and Downs of a Very Special Superhero

Welcome!



I'm a sister to a brother with Down Syndrome, children's book author, and former Special Education teacher with my Masters in Special Education... so I guess it's safe to say Down Syndrome advocacy is a strong passion of mine.

My goal of this guide is to share the strategies for inclusion and understanding about Down Syndrome that you can easily implement in your everyday life.

If you're a parent or an educator teaching your kids about Down Syndrome, and you aren't sure how to explain it on their level (or at all), **I got you.**

If you are someone who questions if what they're saying or doing is helpful or harmful, and wants a better understanding about Down Syndrome, **I got you.**

If you're a family member of someone with Down Syndrome who'd love resources and encouragement to guide your conversations with others, **I got you.**

-Melissa

1. "WHAT DO I SAY IF SOMEONE USES THE R-WORD?"

The R-word just isn't right. Period, end of story. And yet people often casually throw it around. There are a few ways to redirect someone.

- "Can you please choose another word?"
- "That word isn't right to say. Can you say something else?"
- "That word is very offensive towards people with intellectual disabilities and their families. Please do not use that word."
- "Federal law actually completely removed that word from official use, it's called Rosa's Law."

If you use this word to mean something ridiculous or dumb, use those words instead. Ridiculous. Dumb. Crazy. Anything but the r-word.

2. "CAN I SAY 'DOWN SYNDROME PERSON'?"

Simply put... you really shouldn't. There's a type of language called "People First Language", and it is actually a legislative act that was passed. It says to put the person before the disability because they are a person first, and their diagnosis does not define who they are.

- "suffering from Down Syndrome"
- "has Down Syndrome"

- "Down Syndrome child"
- "child with Down Syndrome"

- "disabled person"
- "person with a disability"



3. "THEY'RE ALWAYS SO LOVING."

In all honesty, this phrase makes me roll my eyes the most.

Making generalizations like this or "they're so cute!" or "they're just so happy all the time" is belittling to the people you're talking about. It takes away the unique individuality and their multi-dimensional person-hood.

Yes, I would agree that people with Down Syndrome have similarities or characteristics that are typical.

However, it is important to recognize that there is more to each person than just their diagnosis commonalities in your choice of language when talking about things you notice in many people with Down Syndrome.

4. "I CAN'T ALWAYS UNDERSTAND WHAT THEY ARE SAYING."

Let's set the scene... you're talking to someone with Down Syndrome and you don't understand what they're saying. Because the tongue is a muscle and people with Down Syndrome have lower muscle tone, it is common for speech to not be as clear all the time.

Do you repeat themselves, or is that rude? Do you go based on what you did understand? Do you not say much and nod or smile?

First, lovingly ask them to repeat themselves. No, it's not rude if done kindly. If you still are unsure, ask them to either spell the word (depending on their age and skill set) or prompt them to show you or gesture to what they're talking about. It's not rude to take a minute to get clarity about what they're saying. What IS rude is to not respond or say anything when they're trying to have a conversation with you.

5. "SHOULD I TELL MY KIDS NOT TO STARE?"



I'm sure this has happened to you. You're out in public at the store or the playground and you see someone with Down Syndrome or another visible disability. Your kids start to stare at them because they're curious kids who have never met someone with this disability. Because of that, it feels strange or foreign or even scary to them.

It's natural to get embarrassed because you don't want them to be rude, but you don't really know what else to do.

If all you're going to do is say "don't stare", then don't do that. However, if you're going to redirect them from staring and then encourage them to be kind, then that's great.

You are setting the tone for how your kids interact with people with disabilities going forward in this one situation. So encourage them to smile, wave, say hi, and even go up and introduce themselves. A simple "hi, my name is ___" is great! And I'd encourage you to do the same!

Let's keep this conversation of inclusion strategies going because *together, we can educate and advocate.*



If you liked this guide, then you'll love the book about Down Syndrome that I wrote. I'll include the link below so you don't have to go searching.

I'm easy to find on Instagram, Facebook, and Pinterest at @specialupsanddowns. I'd love to connect with you more there!

check out the book