

# Toys & Play for children with: Down's Syndrome



Down's Syndrome is caused when there is one extra chromosome in the cells. Children with Down's syndrome will have some form of learning difficulty but they are usually able to lead an almost normal life. It is not a disease or illness and cannot be cured.

- Around 1 in 800 children are born with this condition.
- Children with Down's syndrome have a specific learning profile with characteristic strengths and weaknesses.

**Their strengths include a strong visual awareness and visual learning skills, including the ability to:**

- Learn and use sign, gesture and visual support
- Copy the behaviour and attitudes of peers and adults
- Learn from hands-on activities

**Their weaknesses include:**

- Delayed motor skills – fine and gross
- Auditory and visual problems
- Speech and language difficulties
- Poor short-term auditory memory
- Short concentration span
- Avoidance strategies

(For further information go to [www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk))

## How play and games can aid development

Down's Syndrome children benefit from having the chance to play with a range of different toys. Because they may have difficulty interacting with others it is important that they have as much chance as possible to enjoy creative play and be involved in some sort of social interaction.

They can also have problems with communication and sometimes low muscle tone, all of which can be helped by play. It is a good idea to become a play partner and show your child how to play with their toys. Show them what a toy does, how to get it to make a noise or to move, how to screw and unscrew it and how to hide it. By demonstrating to your child how to do more interesting things with toys, you can prevent them getting stuck on repetitive patterns of play.

Many children with Down's Syndrome develop very good imaginative play skills so whenever possible they should have

the chance to interact with others. This will help overcome their natural reticence.

Sensory and soft play is popular with younger Down's Syndrome children. As with all young children they enjoy playing in a safe and comfortable environment that will make them feel at ease.

Many find mathematics more difficult than reading and need to develop their practical skills rather than spending time writing things down. Difficulties in processing language together with remembering what to do and in which order can also restrict their capacity to complete mathematical tasks. Simple repetitive tasks such as counting and moving blocks from one bowl to another can aid their development.

### generic toys that could be used to assist development

**Fine movement:** rattles, beads, sliders.

**Sensory development:** swings, bouncing seats, soft toys.

**Cognitive development:** sorters, stacking games, building blocks, peg boards.

**Auditory development:** CDs, musical instruments, toys that make sounds.

**Visual development:** mirrors, mobiles, toys that light up, moving lights.





## Types of toys and games to aid development

- All the toys and games you choose should be safe and have large parts as these will aid with your child's motor skills and development. Also the large parts will be safe to use as they cannot be swallowed.
- Toys should be simple and fun to play with so that your child will not get confused or feel frustrated.
- Choose activities and games that do not surprise your child, ones that make them feel comfortable and safe.
- Imaginative games provide valuable opportunities to teach new vocabulary and language to young children.
- Try to find toys that fulfil a number of purposes including developing their motor skills and manipulation. e.g. Building blocks, pull alongs, and toys where your child has to fit shapes into spaces.
- Number card games and matching activities are also popular as are games involving counting.
- Older children may enjoy games involving textures and shape as they are very tactile.

- Dolls and cars are popular toys as are colouring in sets which use thicker crayons and help with the development of motor skills.
- Children with Down's Syndrome also tend to be good at learning by imitating or copying other people and so puppets might be a useful aid.
- Simple jigsaw puzzles will help with both motor skills and social interaction.
- Simple board games are always a good idea as are ones involving tweezers or tongs.
- Practice using scissors and pencils.
- Put some stones or marbles in a bowl and get them to take them out one by one.
- Down's Syndrome children enjoy singing so why not try some repetitive songs that are popular because they feel comfortable and reassured and help your child to develop their vocabulary skills and language abilities.
- Many older Down's Syndrome children like to draw and copy pictures.

## Play tips

- Spend time talking to your child whilst they play.
- Look for things that you can do together.
- Join in with imaginative play so that you can show your child what to do.
- Show your child what to do with a toy or game and give them sensitive support when encouraging them to play with others.
- Do not pressurise them to do too much.
- Try to let them take the lead and then join in.
- Encourage them to pick up things and explore their senses.



**It's important that all children have the opportunity to play for play's sake**

## POSSIBLE RESOURCES

**Cherry has a Learning Difficulty.** Eleanor Archer. Franklin Watts.

**Living with Down's syndrome.** Brian Jenny. Hodder Wayland

**What does it mean to have Downs Syndrome?** Louise Salisbury. Heinemann

**Now we are talking** DVD. Symbol Trust. (01795 844440)

## Look out for this symbol!

Toys with this symbol contain small parts that could be swallowed. They should only be given to children over 3 years or of a more advanced development.



## CONTACT ORGANISATIONS AND USEFUL LINKS.

**Down's Syndrome Society.**  
www.downs-syndrome.org.uk  
0845 2320 0372

**Down's Syndrome Centre**  
www.downsyndromecentre.ie  
00 353 (0)1 661 8000

**Montessori Toys and Down's Syndrome**  
www.latoystore.com/blog/2009/01/  
montessori-toys-downs-syndrome/

**www.specialneedstoys.com.**