

10 THINGS TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME

BY GILLIAN MARCHENKO

1. Know the definition of Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome 21 have 47 Chromosomes instead of 46 in each cell. This is because of an error in cell division called nondisjunction. At some point, a pair of 21st chromosomes in either the sperm or the egg fails to separate. As the embryo develops, an extra chromosome is copied in every cell of the body.

2. Use people first language. People first language is simply putting the person before the disability in speech. Don't say the Down syndrome girl. Use the child's name, and if needed in the conversation, add that she has Down syndrome. Also, the correct term is Down syndrome. Not Down's syndrome. A child does not have Downs.

3. Pay attention to how you treat the child. Remember, you set the tone. Treat your student with Down syndrome like the other kids in class Don't give special treatment, and don't ignore him or her because it is easier.

4. Explain Down syndrome to your students. Talk to your students about Down syndrome. Go to www.gillianmarchenko.com to learn about ways to introduce Down syndrome to a class. Invite the parent to come help!

5. Find out health and safety concerns. Be sure to review your student's medical records. Find out if she has any constraints for recess or gym, and check with the parents about safety issues.

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6. Identify how the child learns. First and foremost, children with Down syndrome **CAN LEARN!** But all children learn differently. Your job is to figure out how your student learns, and then work with other professionals in your school to modify the classwork to give him every chance to succeed. Not sure how/what to do? **RESEARCH.** Ask the parents. Check with special education teachers.

7. Partner with the child's parents. No one knows your student better than her parents. Network and communicate with them often. Don't wait for an IEP meeting that happens twice a year. Send a communication journal home in the child's backpack.

8. Read your student's IEP often. Read the IEP often. Look for ways to incorporate your student's goals in the everyday life of the class.

9. Don't assume your student can't do something. Always start with the idea that he or she can do anything other students do. Model the task for your student, or pair him up with a buddy who can help. Peer interaction will be a huge motivator for a child with Down syndrome.

10. Realize that you play a big role in your student's success! Create a great environment for your student. Use his gifts and talents and interests to motivate him in his work and give lots of positive feedback and encouragement. What a privilege it is to play such a vital role in your student's life.



Gillian Marchenko is mom to 2 girls with Down syndrome, & author of SUN SHINE DOWN, a memoir about her daughter Polly.