

## WELCOMING GIRLS WITH

# Down Syndrome

## INTO YOUR TROOP

Down syndrome is not a disease, but rather a genetic condition that occurs when individuals have a third copy of the 21st chromosome. It is the most frequently occurring chromosomal disorder and occurs in approximately one in every 800 births. Your trooper will be able to do pretty much everything everyone else can do but it might take her a little longer to do these things, and she may need a little extra help. She is usually very social and thrives with friendships and inclusion.

Individuals with Down Syndrome have a learning profile that includes being a visual learner and needing extra processing time to understand verbal speech due to working memory differences.

Medically, people with Down Syndrome have a higher incidence of respiratory infections, vision and hearing problems, low muscle tone, and speech challenges. They often experience physical (gross and fine motor) and intellectual delays.

There is a wealth of information on the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas website, under the Education section, including DS101 and peer presentations. <http://www.dsact.org/resources/education/>

### **Some suggestions and strategies for preparing for and including girls with Down syndrome in your troop:**

1. Have high expectations!
2. Provide structure and routine.
3. Visual schedules of the meeting plan with either written words or pictures lessen anxiety.
4. Give short, clear expectations/directions. Written is better than verbal since she is a visual learner. Keep verbiage to a minimum.
5. Give instructions in small chunks and small steps because short-term memory is not a strength; she may not be able to remember multiple items at a time.
6. Provide visual representation of rules, instructions, and expectations. Write down the steps to a craft project. Use pictures of the steps or the finished product. Model or demonstrate each step.
7. She is a tactile, concrete learner.
8. Use lots of repetition because of short term working memory.
9. Allow extra processing time: 10 seconds can change a life! If you try to rush her, she may become frustrated and shut down. It is like being on dial up Internet in a high-speed world. When given extra
- time to process, there is less frustration.
10. Do NOT keep repeating directions during processing time. It interrupts the thought process.
11. Be consistent with behavior expectations. Do not say something you will not enforce. Set the same expectations for everyone.
12. Offer two choices that you will be happy with such as: You can use a marker or a pencil. You can sit at the table or on the floor.

13. Do not ask questions that can be answered with a NO, unless you are willing to accept that answer.
14. Provide notice before a transition. Let her know several minutes ahead if you are going to transition from one activity to another. Have a plan, like a timer, visual schedule, or a job (carry something, put things away). This is especially true when transitioning from a preferred activity to a nonpreferred.
15. Allow the child to feel successful by adjusting expectations.
16. Use peers as role models since girls with DS are great imitators.
17. Receptive language is generally better than expressive language so provide ways other than speech to communicate such as pictures to select or words to fill in the blank if you are checking for understanding when earning a badge.
18. Since speech may be difficult to understand ask the girl to slow down and repeat what she said. If you still cannot understand, ask her one more time and then acknowledge that you are not sure. If you think you know, ask if you are correct. If incorrect, ask if she can show you. If you have other questions or concerns you may contact the GSFA committee via email at [gsfa@gscctx.org](mailto:gsfa@gscctx.org) or GSCTX at [www.gscctx.org/contactus](http://www.gscctx.org/contactus) or via phone at 1-800-733-0011.

This document is not intended to replace or supersede any doctor's instructions nor should it in any way be taken as medical advice or directions. This resource is a suggestion for GSCTX volunteers to use while welcoming girls to their troops with special needs and is for informational and educational purposes only. Please follow a parent/guardian's instructions in the medical care of their child and make sure you always have the appropriate medical and troop permission forms completed and available for Emergency Medical Services (EMS) personnel.