

POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR TOOLKIT

EDUCATORS | PROFESSIONALS

Understanding the common behaviours exhibited by children with Down syndrome is essential for providing appropriate support and intervention. This fact sheet explored some common behaviours observed in children with Down syndrome, considering their unique physiological needs and cognitive challenges. By recognising and addressing these behaviours, all stakeholders can create supportive environment that promote the well-being and development of children with Down syndrome.

For children with Down syndrome, behaviour serves as a vital means of communication. Children with Down syndrome may face challenges in expressing themselves verbally. As a result, their behaviours—whether positive or challenging—often convey important messages about their needs, feelings, and experiences.

It is essential for parents, caregivers, and educators to recognise and interpret these behaviours as forms of communication, allowing for a deeper understanding of the child's perspective and providing appropriate support and intervention.

Physiological Needs

The unique physiological needs of students with Down syndrome can influence their behaviour. Cognitive function in the areas of memory, processing speed and language skills are significantly impacted, which can make it challenging for children with Down syndrome to express their needs and navigate social interactions effectively. Additionally, sensory processing issues are common, affecting how children with Down syndrome perceive and respond to stimuli in their environment.

COMMON BEHAVIOURS

“Stop and Flop”

- The most reported behaviour, both in homes and at school.
- Usually seen in younger children.
- Often happens at a transition time, for example, when a child is asked to stop completing an activity they enjoy (sometimes even when transitioning to an enjoyable activity).
- Child may become ‘floppy’ and may or may not verbalise.
- This may turn into ‘task refusal’ as the child grows older - the child may not physically drop to the floor, instead, verbally refusing to complete a task or activity by saying ‘no’.

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Bolting

- Clinical term is 'elopement' – which means running off.
- There are different reasons as to why a child might run away. One is to get to something they like or enjoy. Another is to get away from something they dislike or do not enjoy.
- Identified as the most difficult behaviour by both parents/carers and professionals. This is because of the risk involved.
- A behaviour which (unlike others) cannot be ignored.
- Child might be upset, or may think it is a game.

Hands on/Hitting

- Particularly common in individuals with limited expressive language.
- Most frequent cause of referral to behaviour specialists by schools.
- Can often occur far more at school than at home – a child who has never shown 'hands on' behaviour at home may show this behaviour at school.
- Can look like: hitting, kicking, pulling, pushing, slapping.

Stimming

- Neither positive nor negative behaviour – simply a behaviour which 'feels good'.
- Takes many forms – flicking, squeezing, bouncing, clicking tongue, flapping hands.
- Only a problem if it interferes with an individuals' ability to interact with others or to learn new skills, or is damaging (e.g. grinding teeth).
- Can be a way to relieve stress or anxiety, or to simply relax.

Lack of Boundaries

- Comes with loving people and social attention.
- A desire to show fondness and affection in a physical way, e.g. hugging or kissing.
- Can become more of an issue with older children, e.g. teenagers and issues of consent.
- Is also a risk regarding a lack of awareness of 'stranger danger'.

Insistence on 'Sameness' and Routine

- In an unpredictable world, this is a way of ensuring the environment of an individual is as safe and reliable as possible.

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- This can result in high levels of agitation and frustration when there are changes to these routines and habits, e.g. making a meal slightly differently, changing the rules of a game.
- Often shown in a dislike for transitions.
- A way of ensuring security and control – but can be almost impossible to maintain!

So, what's next?

Recognising and understanding these common behaviours is useful.

What is even more important is to consider the underlying causes of these behaviours.

For guidance on understanding behaviour triggers and implementing supportive strategies, we encourage you to explore our other fact sheets. These resources offer valuable insights and practical strategies to help you create a supportive environment for your child's development and well-being. We also have a range of printable resources, linked to research-based best practice, aimed specifically at supporting young people with Down syndrome. These include First/Then Boards, Routine Charts, Social Stories and more.

See our linked fact sheets:

[What is Positive Behaviour Support?](#)

[Navigating Challenges and Implementing Positive Behavioural Strategies for Children with Down Syndrome.](#)

References

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