

Foundations for Successful Communication

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Disclosures

Review of Learner Outcomes

During this General Convention course, participants will:

- Engage in an overview of communication in children with Down syndrome
- Describe two early communication strengths commonly seen in children with Down syndrome
- List two strategies to support speech and language development for children birth to 5-years-old with Down syndrome

Thomas Center for Down Syndrome

- Evaluations & treatment planning based on best practices and standard of care
- Care coordination, support, and assistance throughout childhood
- Education and advocacy
- Transition planning



Big Questions About Communication

- Will my child talk?
- Will my child ever talk to me about anything other than _____?
- Why do some children speak more clearly than others?



Understanding Our Approach to Communication and Our Children



Reflecting on the messages we send:

- Our children (including those without DS)
- Our family members
- Our friends
- Our communities
- The world at large

“Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another.”

»Desmond Tutu

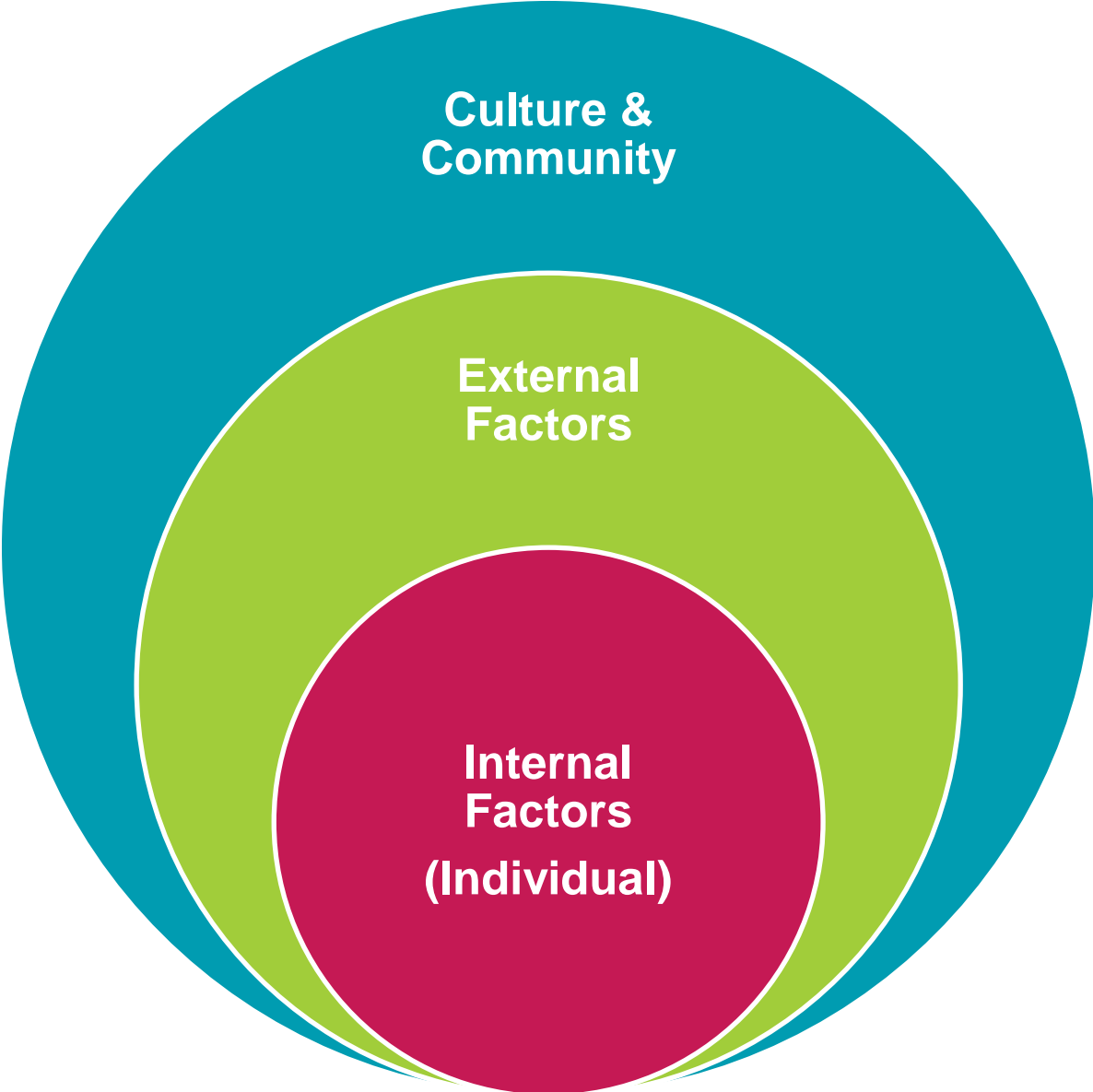


Importance of Strengths

- Use strengths to encourage learning
- Bridge the gap between comprehension and expression
- To understand what supports to use in order to bypass difficulties
- What are *your* strengths?

While children with Down syndrome may have similarities, each child follows their own unique path.





Listening, Understanding, & Talking



- What do we mean by communication?
- What is receptive and expressive language?
- How does speech fit in with all of it?

How Children Learn

- Different than adult learners
- Emergence through experience and interaction



Receptive Language

Also called:

- Auditory comprehension
- Understanding

Examples include:

- Responding to name
- Understanding and following routines
- Anticipating next steps in games
- Listening for details embedded in sentences

Expressive Language

Also called:

- Expressive communication
- Verbal expression

Expressive language may include:

- Speech
- Body language
- Facial expression
- Gestures



Social Language

Strengths

- Variety of communication functions apart from requests
- Development of relationships
- Use of gestures
- Conveying stories when given visual supports
- Responding to requests for communication repairs

Challenges

- Avoidance strategies
- Decreased initiation in learning contexts
- Decreased elaboration during conversation
- Difficulty signaling when something isn't understood

Joint Attention



- Focusing the attention of a partner
- Voluntary eye gaze coordination between a partner and object of interest
- Optimal impact on learning occurs during joint attention
- Considerations in children with Down syndrome

Social Communication Concerns

- Is it autism?
- Necessity of observation across contexts
- Two patterns of DS+ASD: early signs & regression
- **Joint attention** in children with DS vs DS+ASD
- **Limited gestures** in DS+ASD compared to DS peers



Communication in Early Ages & Stages of Development




Building a Solid Foundation for Communication



Cognitive

- Auditory awareness
- Imitation
- Cause & effect
- Play plans
- Categories




Sensory Processing & Organization

- Perception & organization
- Attention
- Processing & understanding



Motor

- Control & planning
- Postural stability
- Mobility



Hearing & Vision

- Importance for communication
- Changes can happen throughout life
- Guidelines for those with DS (Bull et al., 2022)

Pre-Speech Sound Development



Early Months

- Develop sound awareness
- Encourage visual awareness
- Position for stability
- Use toys that can be watched or heard



First Year

Think about vocabulary development:

- Does it the word occur frequently?
- Is it motivating?

Focus on activities that:

- Encourage face-to-face interactions (e.g., position when looking at toys or pictures)
- Develop sound awareness and discrimination
- Are reciprocal in nature (e.g., early turn-taking games)

Sign Language



- Look for readiness: waving, blowing kisses, etc.
- Start with a small number of concrete signs
- Accept approximations and “made up” signs
- Signs drop out with verbal competence

Toddler

- Encourage turn-taking play
- Continue signing
- Sing songs with motions
- Play “follow-the-leader” games
- Read and point to pictures
- Encourage pretend play
- Use the child’s interests to build vocabulary



Toddler – Preschool



- Explore printed words paired with photos
- Always leave time for a response
- Gather groups of objects to practice matching, naming, and categories
- Model and expand on what the child says or signs



Preschool

- Encourage peer interactions. Don't get discouraged!
- Use sight words as a cue for vocabulary development
- Continue to model speech and expand on what the child says
- Use daily activities to guide language experience



Strategies for Increasing Successful Communication

- Ask, “Is this goal focused on helping my child or is it to help others interacting with my child?”
- Will this goal cause stress or anxiety?

Adapted from [Play Spark](#)



Establishing Predictability

- **What** is happening, what is going to happen, and what are you supposed to be doing?
- **When** are you expected to start, stop or finish the activity?
- **Where** is the activity supposed to occur?
- **Why** are things happening as they are?

Preparation Payoff

- Reviewing activities using words *and* pictures
- Break the message down and present it slowly according to the needs of the child



Visual Supports



A structured timetable of activities will help your child understand what's going on and what to expect

Using Picture Schedules

A picture schedule:

- Can help a child understand the activity and expectations
- Can be checked and rechecked independently
- Is much easier to understand than a purely verbal description of the day's events

Schedules should be:

- Customized to meet the needs of each child
- Varied according to number of pictures and activities to ensure maximum comprehension and success

Social Stories

Social stories are useful for:

- Preparing for new situations
- Building scripts for interaction
- Providing visual support and repetition for learning and retention
- Helping with behavior
- Create your own or use a [predeveloped](#) story

Modifying Directions

- Present in a very concrete and specific way
- State exactly what will happen and exactly what is wanted
- Don't assume the child can "read between the lines"



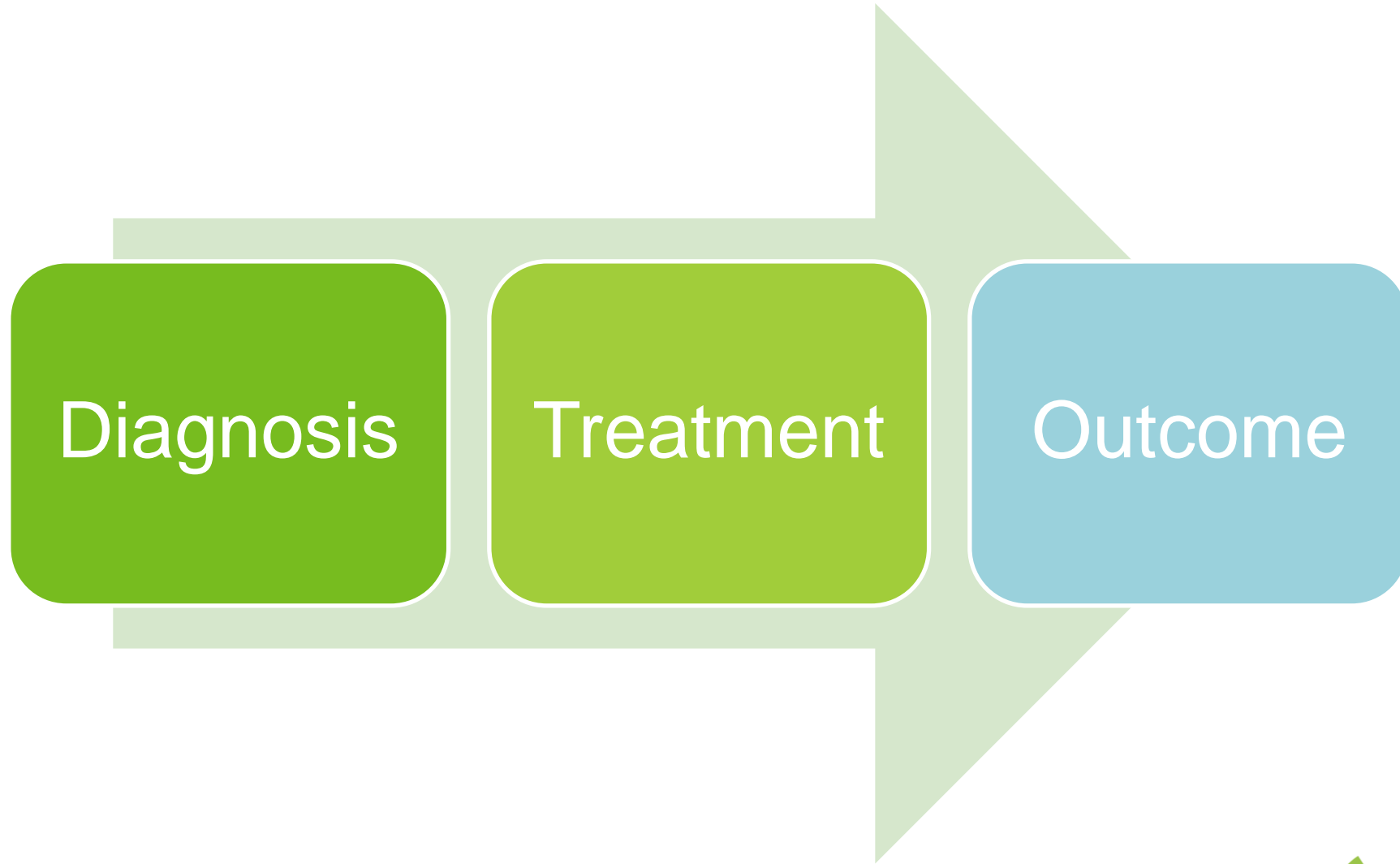
Modifying Directions (cont.)



- Avoid using negatives
- Tell the child what you want them to do
- Avoid use of abstract terms such as:
 - Wait
 - Maybe
 - Later

Evidence-Based Practice & Treatment





How to Choose Therapies

“...There has to be as solid a scientific basis as possible, based on well-grounded theory and good quality research, for any approach, technique or "tool" to be used in therapy.”

[Caroline Bowen, PhD](#)

Evaluating Treatment Tools

“In our quest to help ... we are always looking for the newest and best treatments... Although many of these treatments are valid and have potential use, many others advertised may not live up to their promised result.”

» [ASHA Leader, July 5, 2011](#)

Determining If a Product is Right for Your Child



Heard About a New Product or Treatment?

[Ask these questions before deciding what to do.](#)

Speech & Language Resources

- Evidence related to specific treatment methods?
- What about [gestalt learning](#)?
- Promising early work related to programs that include:
 - Parent responsivity training
 - Teaching child to initiate nonverbal communication during social routines in their natural environment
 - Setting up environment to facilitate communication and taking advantage of child's interests

Speech & Language Resources (Cont.)

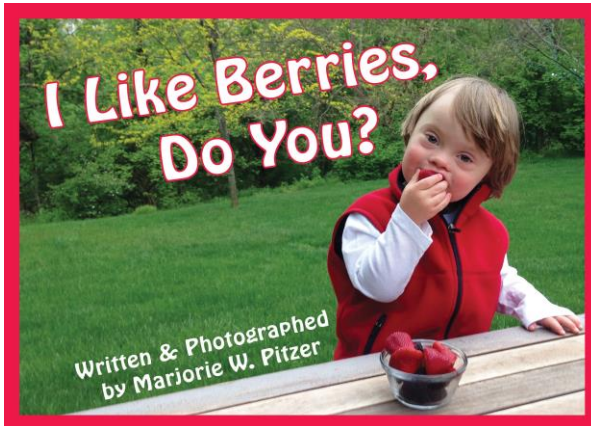
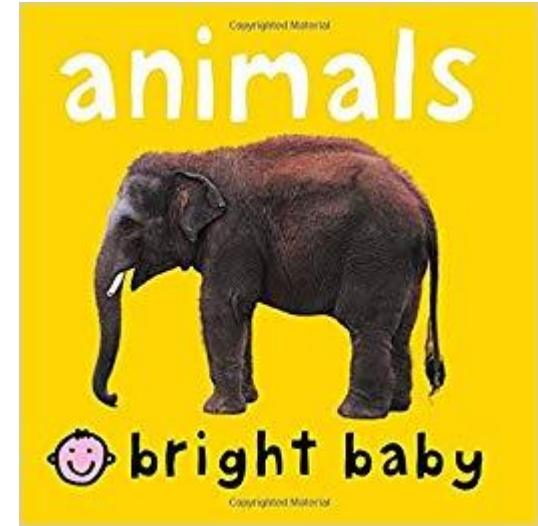
Early communication programs:

- Hanen's "[It Takes Two to Talk](#)"

Supplemental programs:

- [See and Learn Language and Reading](#)
- [See and Learn Speech](#)
- [The Learning Program](#)

Example Books and Materials



Additional Journal Article Links

- Hamner, T., Hepburn, S., Zhang, F., Fidler, D., Rosenberg, C. R., Robins, D. L., & Lee, N. R. (2020). Cognitive Profiles and Autism Symptoms in Comorbid Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 41(3), 172–179. DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000745
- Kent, R. D., & Vorperian, H. K. (2013). Speech Impairment in Down Syndrome: A Review. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 56(1), 178-210. DOI: 10.1044/1092-4388(2012/12-0148)
- Laws, G., & Hall, A. (2014). Early hearing loss and language abilities in children with Down syndrome. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 49(3), 333-342. DOI:10.1111/1460-6984.12077
- Martin, G. E., Klusek, J., Estigarribia, B., & Roberts, J. E. (2009). Language Characteristics of Individuals with Down Syndrome. *Topics in language disorders*, 29(2), 112–132.
- O’Toole, C., Lee, A. S.-Y., Gibbon, F. E., van Bysterveldt, A. K., & Hart, N. J. (2018). Parent-mediated interventions for promoting communication and language development in young children with Down syndrome. *The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 10, CD012089. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD012089.pub2

Encouraging Communication in the Early Years

- Use play to promote communication
- Pair prompts with environmental arrangement
- Incorporate gestures, vocalizations, joint attention, and spoken words into activities
- Use responsive interaction strategies
- Therapy sessions should include parent involvement & education

Questions & Discussion

