


Mastering Social Skills for Success in the Workplace

July 22, 2023 - National Down Syndrome Congress Convention

Katie Frank, PhD, OTR/L | Occupational Therapist
Abby Rowley, LCSW | Social Worker



Advocate Health Care
Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH


1




2

Please note:

- This presentation is intended for families, caregivers, health care professionals, and service providers of individuals with Down syndrome.
- The information in this presentation is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to serve as a substitute for a medical, psychiatric, mental health, or behavioral evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment plan by a qualified professional.
- We recommend that you bring specific questions about an individual with Down syndrome to their medical and/or therapy providers.



Advocate Health Care



Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

3

Objectives

- Describe the common characteristics that support or hinder successful employment for individuals with Down syndrome.
- Identify common social skills areas that impact job performance.
- Provide practical strategies and resources to help develop specific social skill areas.



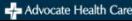
Advocate Health Care



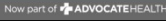
Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

4

Background



Advocate Health Care

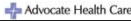


Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH


5

What are social skills?

- Skills used to communicate and interact with each other, both verbally and non-verbally, through gestures, body language, and our personal appearance.
- These are learned skills.



Advocate Health Care



Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

6

Why should social skills be taught?

- Rules are not always clear and often unwritten.
- Rules do not apply to all situations.
- Social competency requires abstract thinking.
- Lack of appropriate social skills may lead to negative consequences.
 - Embarrassment
 - Disagreements
 - Being reprimanded at work or school
 - Losing a job, a friend...

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

7

Importance of employment for individuals with Down syndrome

- Financial support
- Increase self-esteem
- Provides a sense of purpose
- Opportunity for social engagement and communication
- Encourage physical activity
- Lifelong learning

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

8

Employment and Down syndrome

- Studies on work show that job loss for someone with I/DD is very commonly related to lack of interpersonal skills and are not related to completing the actual job tasks.
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Temperament
 - Social awareness
- Employers often praise employees with DS.
 - Thorough work
 - Persistent
 - Reliable

(Greenspan & Shultz, 1981; Reitman, Drabman, Speaks, Burkley, & Rhode, 1999)

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

9

Common characteristics of most (but not all) people with Down syndrome

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

10

Strong visual memory

Strengths

- Good at remembering visual data
- "Video-graphic memory"

Challenges

- Slower auditory processing
- Limited sense of time and chronological order
- Memories experienced as if happening now

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

11

Self-talk and imaginary friends

Strengths

- Process
- Cope
- Prevent boredom

Challenges

- Social appropriateness

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

12

The "Groove"

Strengths

- Functional
- Can help build routines and healthy habits

Challenges

- Inflexibility

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

13

Concrete thinking

Strengths

- Follow instructions

Challenges

- Abstract concepts difficult to grasp
- Take comments literally
- Difficulty generalizing skills across settings

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

14

Empathy radar

Strengths

- Sensitive and compassionate to others

Challenges

- Internalize the feelings of others
- Difficulty managing emotions

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

15

The brain

Strengths

- Provides a unique perspective

Challenges

- Areas of the brain that are impacted are responsible for memory, planning, decision making, problem solving, social behaviors, and attention and language.

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

16

Common social skill areas of concern

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

17

Skills to be learned

- Communicating needs
- Lack of rules
- Gray areas
- Appropriate conversation topics
- Professional behaviors
- Personal/Social boundaries
- Problem-solving skills
- Managing emotions
- Flexibility
- Conversation skills with people in various roles
- Planning skills
- Initiation skills

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

18

Common workplace problem scenarios

- Too much downtime
- Wanting to make friends at work
- Too many tasks to do and remember
- Being interrupted
- Freezing up when overwhelmed
- Admitting mistakes and asking for help

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

19

Practical strategies to teach social skills

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

20

Strategies that work for most

- Teach how the individual learns best.
 - Visuals, videos, modeling, repetition, practice
- Say what to do instead of what not to do.
 - Establish rules/expectations
 - Be concrete
- Help establish a routine.
- Provide positive reinforcement for desired behaviors.

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

21

Professional behaviors

- What to teach
 - Job etiquette
 - Respecting coworkers
 - How to respond when coworkers behave inappropriately
 - Punctuality
 - Teamwork
 - Grooming/hygiene
- Strategies
 - Model
 - Practice
 - Teachable moment
 - Use visual supports

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

22

Appropriate conversation topics

- What to teach
 - General conversation skills
- Strategies
 - Appropriate conversations visual supports
 - Model appropriate conversations
 - When something is inappropriate, use it as a teachable moment
 - Practice

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

23

Communicating with various people

- What to teach
 - Conversations require the right fit between the person and the topic
- Strategies
 - Visual supports
 - Modeling
 - Role play/Practice
 - Teachable moments

Advocate Health Care

Now part of **ADVOCATEHEALTH**

24

Communicating needs

- Reminders
 - If the individual uses a communication device, make sure it is available to them at work. Program common phrases. Have a work page.
 - Provide alternate/multiple ways to communicate (pictures, whiteboards, tablet, etc).

25

Communicating needs cont.

- Information to share with the workplace
 - Share important background information about the individual.
 - Communicate strategies that are effective with the individual (giving choices, First/Then, simplified language).
 - Speak slowly with the individual with Down syndrome to allow time to process.
 - With self-talk, allow it to happen if it is not disruptive or can direct self-talk to a more appropriate location.
 - Scripted speech

26

Personal/social boundaries

- What to teach
 - Personal boundaries relate to adequate distance during conversations and interactions.
 - Social boundaries relate to who, when, how much, and what we talk about with others.
- Strategies
 - Visuals
 - Modeling
 - Practice
 - Teachable moments

27

Flexibility

- Strategies
 - Use the groove until you cannot
 - Grooves establish quickly- try to redirect
 - Plan ahead and include flexibility from the start
 - Use calendars or visuals
 - Model
 - Practice
 - Teachable moment

28

Lack of rules

- Strategies
 - Establish rules from the start as much as possible
 - Make sure rules apply to everyone
 - Model following the rules
 - Post rules that apply to everyone (for example, dress code or use of cell phones)
 - Role play

29

Abstract thinking/Gray areas

- What to teach
 - The goal is to make things as black and white as possible.
- Strategies
 - Establish rules
 - Plan for obstacles
 - Limit use of non-literal phrases
 - Say what to do instead of what not to do
 - Offer choices

30

Managing emotions

- What to teach
 - Identify emotions, triggers, calming and coping skills
- Strategies
 - Visual supports
 - Provide or identify safe places to take a break
 - Recognize cues and prompt the individual to take a break
 - Consider the tasks and the skills of the individual
 - Acknowledge if you are having a bad day, the individual may notice and change their behavior
 - Model appropriate behavior
 - Practice calming and coping strategies. Create a plan.

31

Planning skills/time management

- What to teach
 - Using modifications and tools to support difficulty with skill development
- Strategies
 - Visuals—Checklists
 - Before assigning tasks, understand that work may not be done quickly
 - Check-ins
 - Timers
 - Say what to do instead of what not to do
 - Break tasks down into simpler steps
 - Modeling
 - Practicing
 - Teachable moments

32

Lack of or slow initiation

- Strategies
 - Break tasks down to simple steps
 - Visuals
 - Timers
 - Check-ins—supervisor or peer
 - Consider and simplify the sequencing of tasks
 - Model
 - Teachable moment

33

Problem solving skills

- What to teach
 - Things do not always go our way
 - What happens when someone says no
 - Conflict management
 - Coping skills
- Strategies
 - Visuals with who to go to for various concerns/issues
 - Visual reminder to ask for help
 - Cue to request assistance
 - Practice
 - Modeling
 - Teachable moment

34

Tips to remembers

- Many employers value the work ethic of individuals with DS.
- Lack of appropriate social skills is one reason individuals with DS may lose their jobs.
- Provide opportunities to learn, practice, and develop appropriate social skills.

35

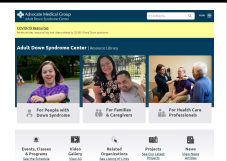
Resource Library

All resources:

<https://adscreources.advocatehealth.com>

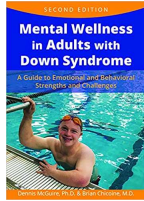
Employment resources:

<https://adscreources.advocatehealth.com/resources/?category=Community%20Participation>



36

Free copy of the Mental Wellness book



<https://adsresources.advocatehealth.com/mental-wellness-in-adults-with-down-syndrome-2nd-edition/>

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

37

Facebook




<https://www.facebook.com/adultdownsyndromecenter>

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

38

Email list



<http://eepurl.com/c7uV1v>

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

39

Contact information

Katie Frank, PhD, OTR/L
Katherine.frank@aah.org

Abby Rowley, LCSW
abigail.rowley@aah.org

Adult Down Syndrome Center,
1610 Luther Lane, Park Ridge, IL 60068
P:847-318-2303

Advocate Health Care Now part of ADVOCATEHEALTH

40