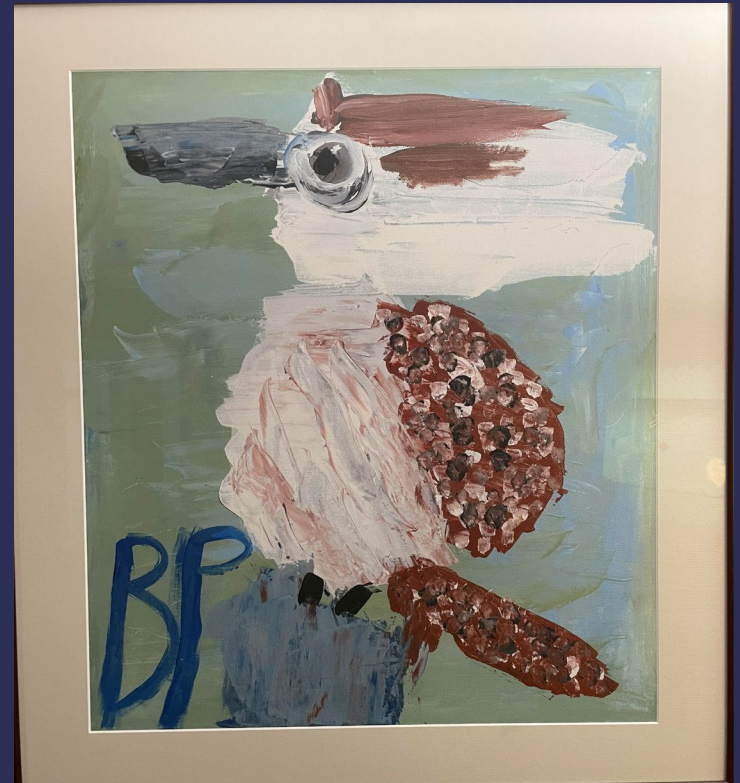
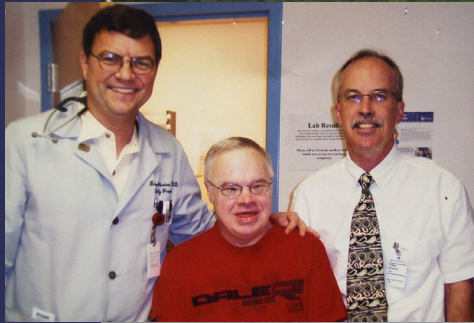


Mental Wellness: Strengths, Gifts and Challenges

Dennis McGuire, Ph.D.







Over the 27 years

- At the Adult Down Syndrome Center
- Chicago (23 years) & Denver (4 years)
- We were a full time clinic

We saw over 6000 people with Down syndrome

We maintained a close partnership with Parents

- We have learned so much
- From People with Down syndrome
- Their Parents and care-givers
- The real experts



What we have learned: Behavioral Characteristics

Incredibly consistent
Strength or
Weakness

Alternative to Mental
health Labeling

Explanation,
A way to solve a
problem &, not
just a label



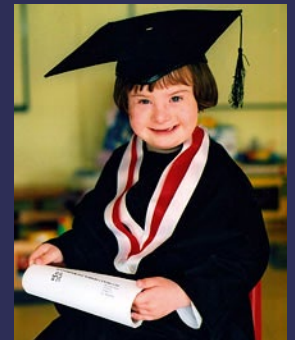
Six Behavioral Characteristics:

1. **Rely on Concrete versus abstract forms of thought**
2. **Social-emotional skills/sensitivity**
3. **Expressive & Receptive language**
4. **Self Talk**
5. **“Grooves”**
6. **Visual Cues/Visual memory**



A Behavioral Characteristic

- Not emphasized in past:
“Concrete thinking and behaving”
- Examples *Not working...*
- Safety training in groups not effective



Concrete and not abstract in their thinking



Other Examples

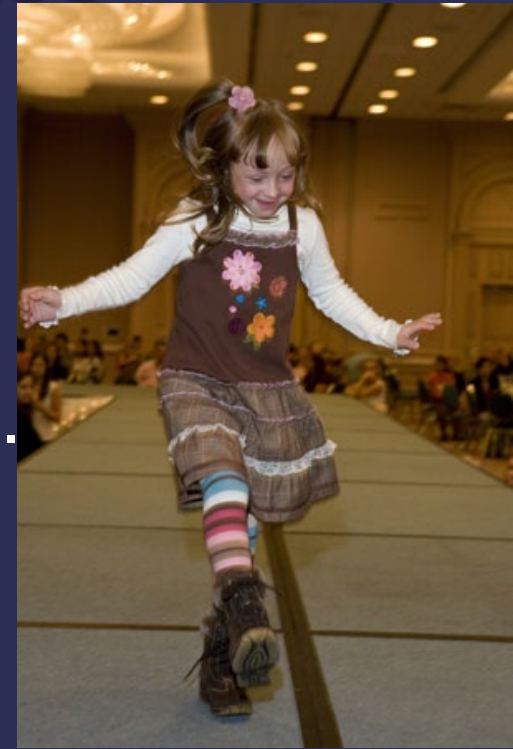
- In a work setting: Boss says “Come see me anytime” {people do}
- Or... “call me anytime” {call at 3 am}
- Time too abstract “5 or 10 minutes”
- Other time concepts are too vague: “Soon”... “tomorrow”..or even ‘Wednesday’



Why concrete thinking creates challenges?

Abstract thought: allows one to see the relationship between things

- Not just the individual (concrete) case.
- Allows one to see other ways to deal with a problem or situation.
- Example: A bus people ride has an unexpected detour (construction) & the person with DS panic's and gets off
- Lou Brown's example
- What to do with concrete thought?: We can use other characteristics



First: the benefits of concrete thinking and behaving:

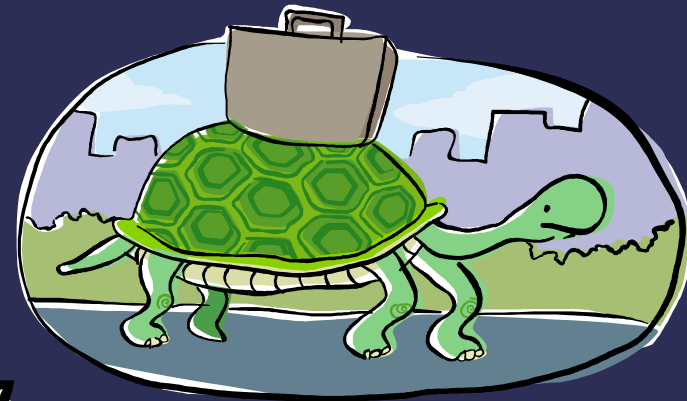
- People with DS are “concrete”, but that also means practical..
- Down to earth, grounded...
- Live in the here and now
- Huge benefits (health and well being) from this...
- A key part and focus of all manner of spiritual practices (meditation, yoga, prayer)



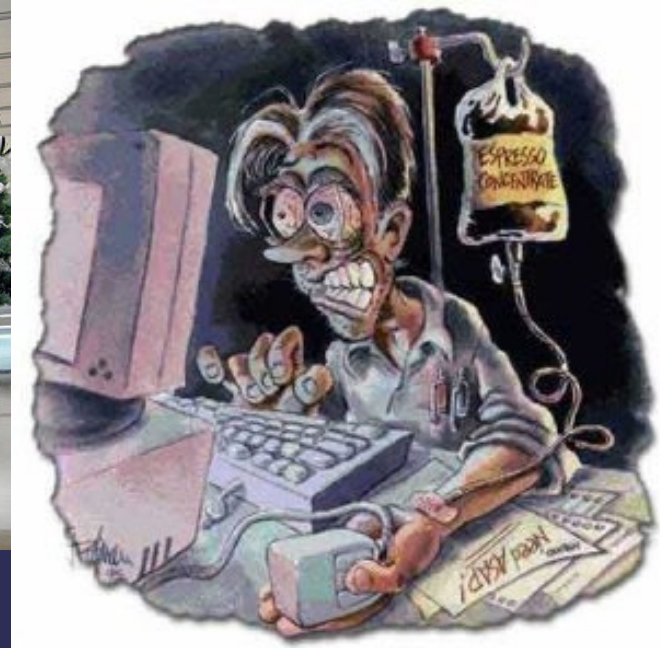
“The Pace”

- People with Down syndrome have a reputation for having two speeds:

SLOW
and **SLOWER**



We can learn so from how they live



Healthy Ways of Living and Looking at Life

Martha Beck: They can teach us
lesson on experiencing the joys
and pleasures of the here and
now

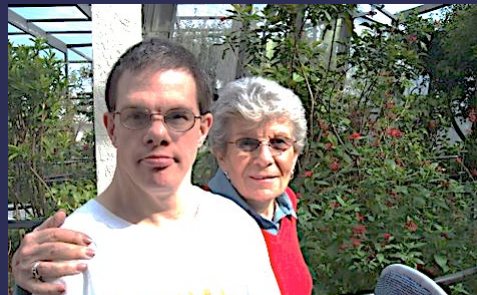
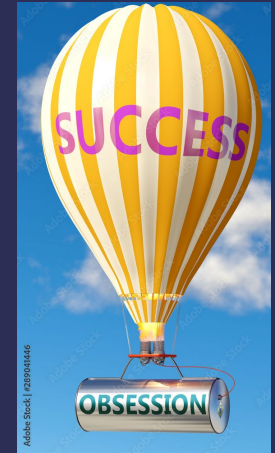


People with DS literally and
figuratively “stop to smell the
roses

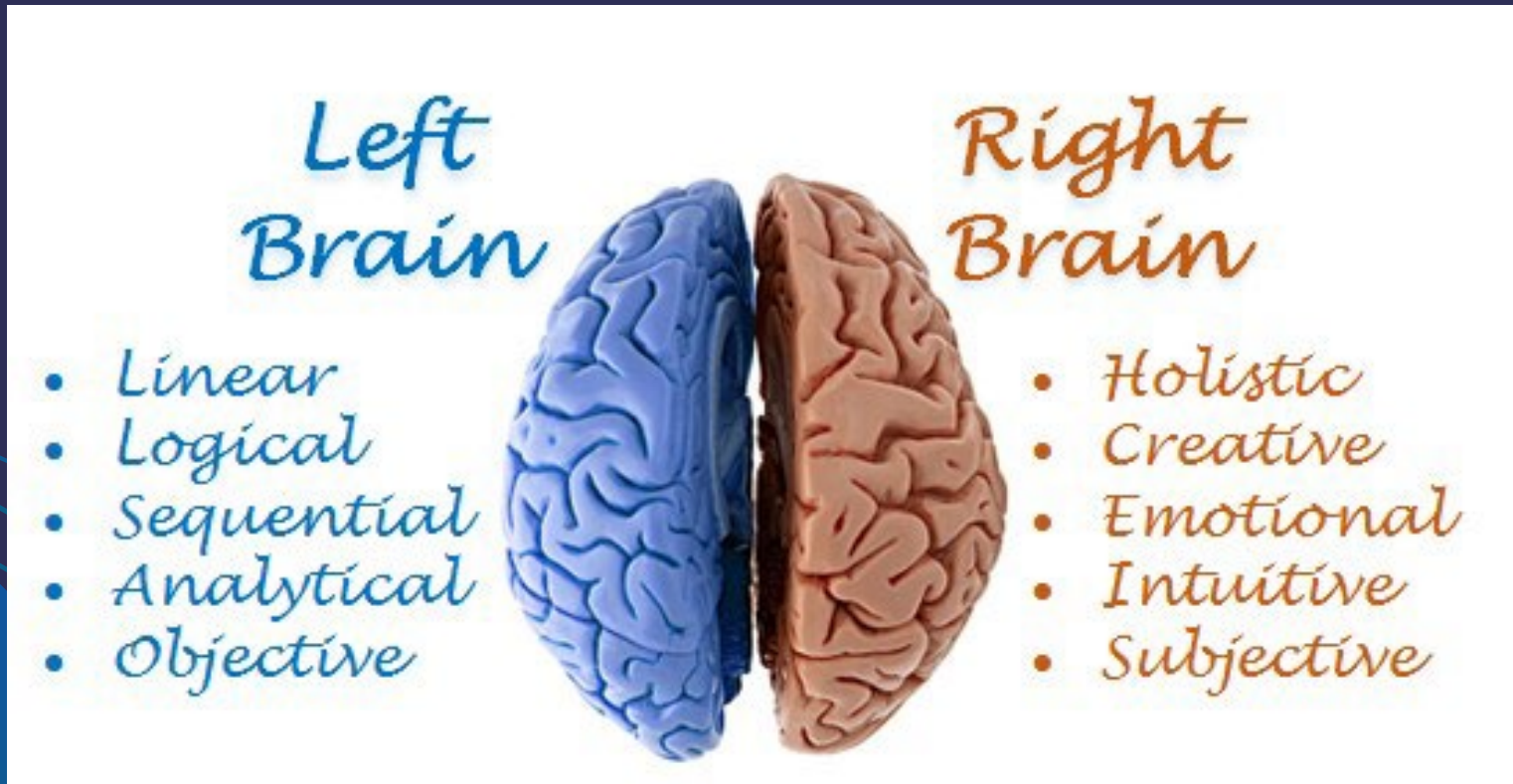


Most important benefit of concrete thinking

- It helps us to avoid pursuit of an abstract idea that may limit and or even hurt us
- For example: Over focusing on succeeding or “keeping up with the Jones”
- Results in a sacrifice of time with family and friends-
- Keeping us from “what really matters”



Research on Left and Right Brain



Jill Bolte Taylor, a brain researcher at Harvard experienced a massive stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain.

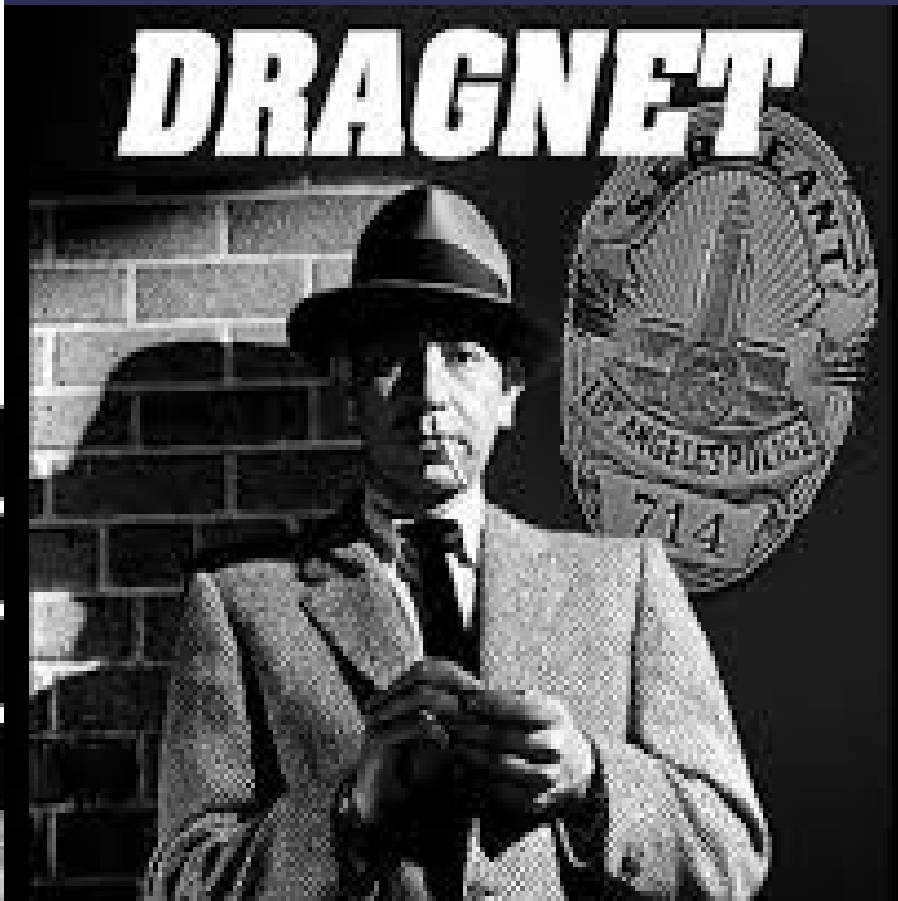


- She could not walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her past life
- Her right Brain was not affected;
- *She experience an intense state of euphoria, well-being, peace, love and sense of belonging*

Left brain is Our inner: Sgt Joe Friday

“The Facts Mam Just the Facts”

- Dealing with life methodicaly, logically , intellectually
- No to the “AIRY FAIRY- LOVEY DOVEY Right brain stuff... All business (cold, stiff, Intellectual, objective)



Left brain

Achiever / “Gets the job done”

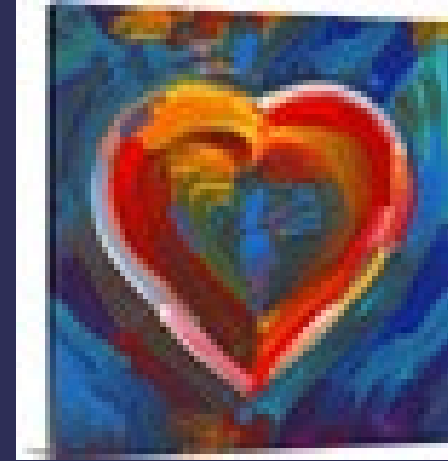
My career/ achievements
- Success, my ego

“Thinking” - **Brain chatter**
Like an annoying uncle



RIGHT BRAIN: Our Heart & Soul /Lover

About Relationships
{source of our
Empathy-intuition}



- Imagination & Creativity (artist)
- Living here & now



Right Brain is where people with Down syndrome live

- They are All about Relationships
(Intuition & empathy)
Lovers



- Have lodes of:
Imagination and creativity
 - Artist/ dancers/ dreamers
- Living in the HERE and NOW



We need to Have LEFT BRAIN / RIGHTBRAIN:

Left Brain

- Survive in the {Material} World
- Pay the mortgage- eat-live
- Achievement/money/power

To much about success, money and power in this world, at the expense of social relationship

Right Brain

- Relationships/others
- Allows us to survive and thrive as social & emotional beings

Joyful lovey-dovey heart stuff does not necessarily pay the bills

Dr Taylor stated: Her stroke was blessing and a revelation”

“a

- There is so much more than achievement, money, success
- We can uncover feelings of well-being, joy, euphoria
- That are often ignored or sidelined by our Left brain
- When we Focus more on relationships than Success



Huge longitudinal studies on all indicators of Life satisfaction/ emotional well being

- Showed the same result over and over (across all studies)
 - It all comes to the:
“Depth and breath of our social relationships”

- Other studies looked at **resilience in the face of major stressors** (loss, flood, Wars)
- again = Social Relationships



How to value Self worth in a world that too often values, money, success achievement, careers? Intellectual, verbal, technical skills



What is that all about?

- Why are they happy and smiling?





All different types of Smiles

- Smile you get from the used car salesman
- The smile my wife gives when she beats me in a card game
- What the late John Prine (country musician) called an Illegal smile
- NO I believe THIS IS THE REAL THING



Maybe we shouldn't make assumptions: How people with DS think and feel about themselves, (age 23) Self Perception Studies:

- Several Studies showed consistent positive results (one fairly large)
- 99% were happy with their lives
- 97% liked who they are
- 96% liked how they looked
- 99% expressed love of their families
- 97% Liked brothers and sisters



Six Behavioral Characteristics:

1. Rely on Concrete versus abstract forms of thought
2. Social-emotional skills/sensitivity
3. Expressive & Receptive language
4. Self Talk
5. “Grooves
6. Visual Cues/Visual memory



Expressive Language

Weakness ↓

Expressive language

- Verbal language not a strength
- “Not good on their feet” with spoken word
- Far better mediums ...



“Taking the Fifth”

- **When asked “How was your day”?**
- **Or questioned about something they did**
- **Many will answer “I don’t know” or try to avoid an answer**
- **Just not comfortable or on an equal footing with verbal exchanges**



Host of problems: If people cannot easily verbalize the cause or source of a problem

- It is more difficult to Identify and solve problems & issues
- Makes people at greater risk for shutting down & depression
- Losing a good job etc



In order to help them explain their world and experiences

Remember their world is

1. Concrete (& not abstract)

2. And Visual (strength)

- Encourage them to use words that are concrete & visual

- Something: See & touch in their immediate world

- To explain their world



Encourage other means to communicate their world

Pair a picture with the spoken word to communicate

This may include:

- **Pictures that show you**
- **Imagine a different scene from a typical “Taking the Fifth” response**
- **When asked what they did?**
- **They show you pictures (coupled with a few choice words) play, dance, work, restaurant, food, etc.**



Encourage other mediums of expression:

- Remember the written word is visual
- Write in: Note pads or Journals
- Example: Capable Young man terrified to talk to his mom (wrote in a journal)
- Art: A phenomenal medium for people with Down syndrome to express themselves & spend hour after hour of quality time
- They may just need crayons, colored pencils and paper







Despite expressive limitations, receptive/emotional skills are excellent

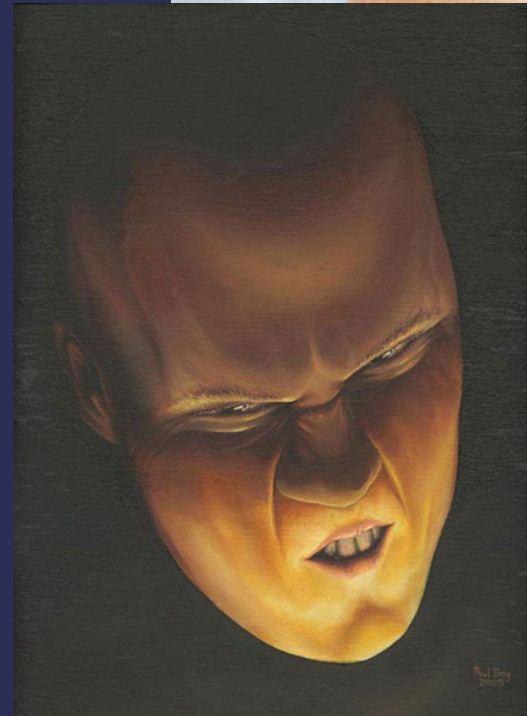
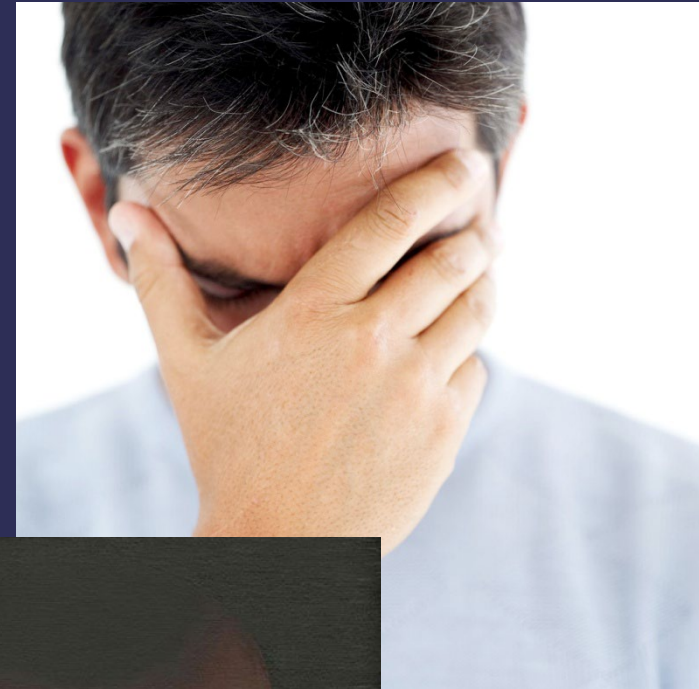
- Many people are very perceptive
- They have excellent intuition
- And an uncanny sensitivity to others (especially loved ones)
- Builds good will





Sensitivity to others

- People may be too sensitive
- Absorb conflicts, and stress from others
- Especially ANGER



People are too Sensitive and Empathic



- Often not able to block negative feelings and emotions encountered
- Even when not directed at them
- They will take the feelings onto themselves
- Suggestion

Despite 35 Years of Papers, Books and Presentations on the Positive Nature of Self Talk

- Concern and controversy persists (parents/professionals)
- 2 major reasons
 1. For teens & adults: Self talk is not acceptable in public
 2. It can also be alarming - dramatic *even in a private space*
 - Includes fantasy play and imagined others



Self Talk is revered in Child Development: Gives ALL children a needed boost when learning a new task;

Child Development people explain

- Parent / teacher explain out loud to the child the steps for a new task
- “Directed action”
- Child goes off and uses “directed action” to complete the new task
- SELF Talk gives them the boost they need



Self Talk over time

- Self talk is gradually Internalized (into our inner speech)
- By about the age of 7 in children
- BUT Much later, (up to 12) in typical children with challenges (learning problems, ADHD, Hearing or visual issues).
- “Because they need the **boost** that the **SELF** Talk gives them”



Researchers Tell Us Self Talk CONTINUES in All of Us !!!

- Resurfaces (become more overt) whenever we have a challenge
- Numerous studies showing most people use inaudible muttering (muttering that is low but still heard)
- It appears then that WE ALL DO IT
- It's just that People with Down syndrome
- May not be as sensitive or aware of the need to cover up



Self talk continues In people with Down Syndrome for compelling reasons

1. They need the extra boost that Self talk gives even more than typical children who are challenged
2. BUT (unlike us) They are not as sensitive or aware of the need to cover up...

Families tell us this with some amazement:

- When chastised (told what to do etc)

3. They may view this as a private space



Self Talk: Viewed as a Social Skill Issue

- Like “Hugging, even “masturbation”
- Nothing inherently wrong
- Just when, & where expressed
- Try to confine to private space



Self talk can be a spectacularly dramatic scene

- “May include the full range of facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements”
- Appears as if the person is on a stage and fully enacting a scene
- With at least one **imaginary other**



Concrete and Visual helps people make sense the world through self talk

Again their world is Concrete & Visual

- Self talk scenes allows them to capture (superb visual memory)
- And then bring the raw (concrete) material from their lives
- Into their personal “self talk” lab
- To see, process and to try to make sense of it in their personal lab
- Especially if they don't understand it



Self Talk as a private theatre/lab



- Offers a window on people's world
- A Change in tone, more anger or self criticism
- Gives us a way to identify a stressor or a scene from their lives
- That they cannot easily verbalize
- But can act out in their private theatre

There are many benefits to “grooves”

- It gives structure and order to peoples daily lives



People with DS have a reputation for being

- Stubborn
- “Grooves”
- Set patterns and routines
- That can drive others a little crazy



Increases independence at home and work

- Once the task is part of a daily routine
- It will be repeated reliably



Benefits

- Careful with their appearance and grooming
- “Meticulous”
- Social benefits,
Public Relations
(PR)



Grooves & Free Time Activity

A way to relax by repeating a favorite activity in a quiet space

- Like 'Yoga'
- Only cheaper



Grooves and Stress

- Under stress a ‘groove’ can become
- Less productive ...
- (AKA an “obsession or compulsion”)
- Groove may be a conduit for stress (Like headache, stomach issues for others)
- **Example: Spend the time making desk “just so”**



For stuck grooves reduce any stressors:

- Do not force a change
- Gently establish new more productive grooves



Another very effective way: 'Reset' stuck grooves



- Use visual cues
- Then help people establish a new more positive routine/groove

Visual “photographic-like” memory



People with DS have exceptional visual memories

- People often remember past people, places and events in great detail
- And in living color



Visual-spatial memory is superb

- Orientation to space is excellent
- Memory for directions is also excellent



Movies & Television

- Visual images from movies and TV may be taken in “whole”
- And replayed over and over



Memory Skills: Escaping & entertainment

- ❑ People may escape rich visual/fantasy world
- ❑ Particularly when in a stressful or boring environment



Visual memory has a major glitch: time

- ❑ People replay events as if happening NOW !
- ❑ With same feelings and emotions of the original event
- ❑ This may be good or bad depending on the memory



Memory: Helps to explain phobias



“In the moment” memory response may be a problem

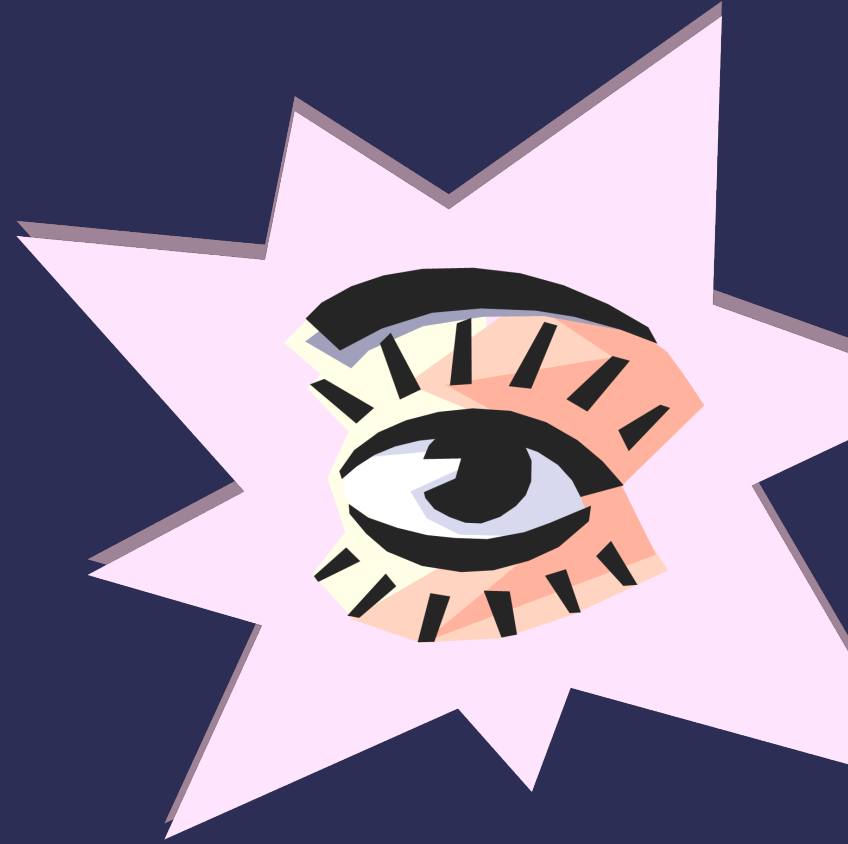


- ❑ People may replay a traumatic memory over and over
- ❑ Such as when there is a major loss,
- ❑ More susceptible to PTSD
- ❑ Examples: ‘Parking lot’



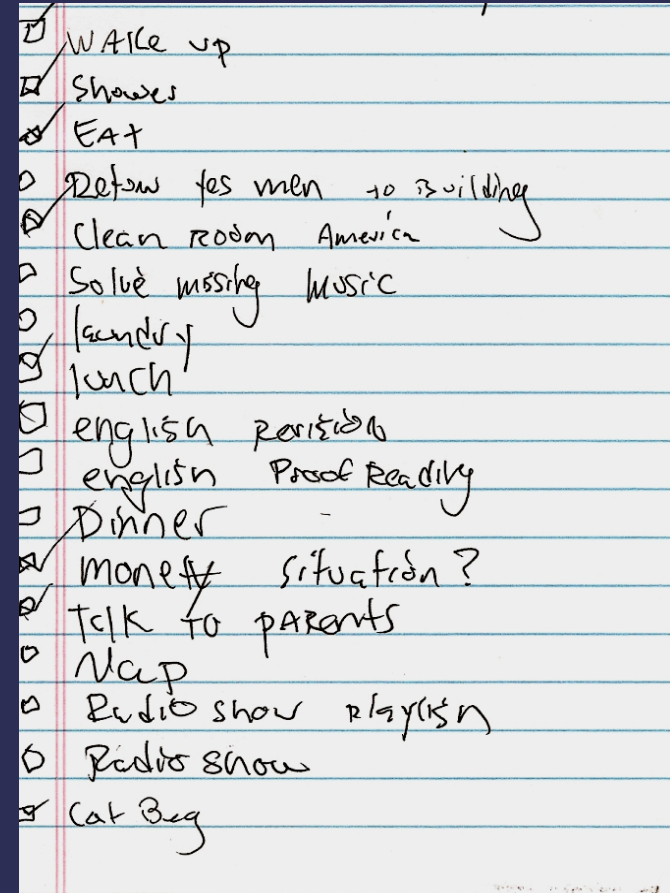
For people with DS: Grooves are 'onboard', but visual is king

- They are visual learners
- They love movies and pictures
- They remember everything they see



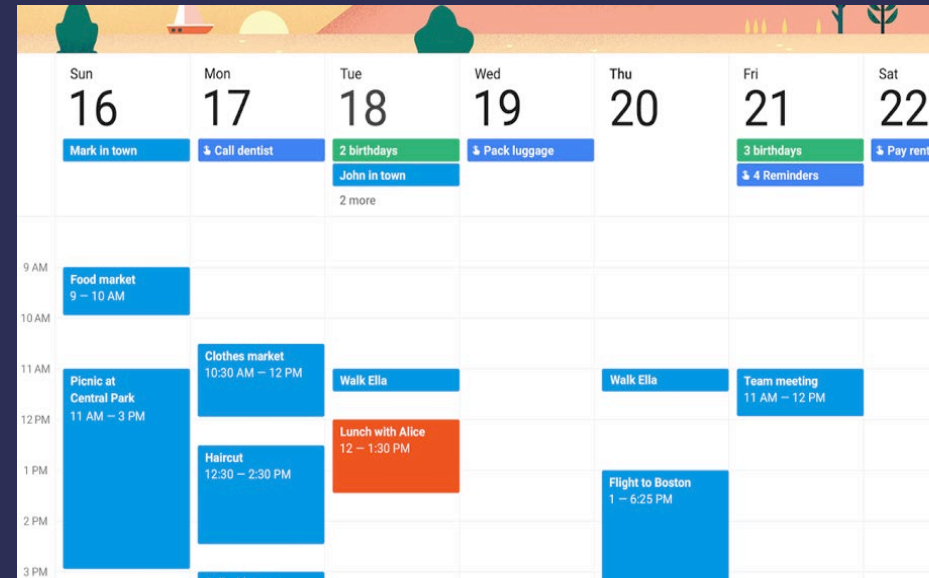
Enormous benefit of visual supports: such as to reset stuck grooves

- Use of pictures or visual schedules or checklists
- Use of calendars
- Visual images for learning tasks
- All to help solve problems



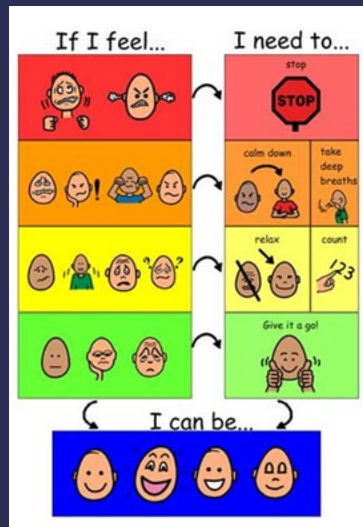
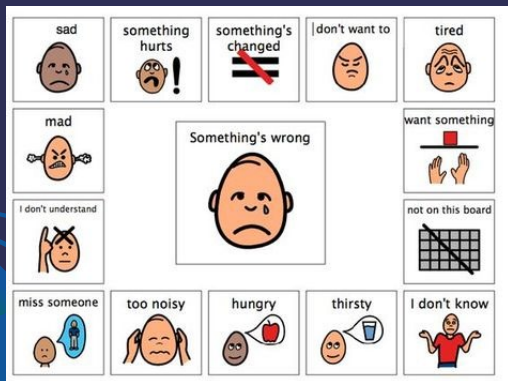
Why calendars are so popular for people with Down syndrome ?

- Time too abstract
- 5 minutes or 5 years means Nothing
- But people easily memorize a calendar
- Allows them to plan and predict



Use of visual supports are limited only by your creativity; Preference of Son/daughter

- Social skills
- Naming & managing emotions/behavior
- Choice board
- Schedules



My Daily Schedule

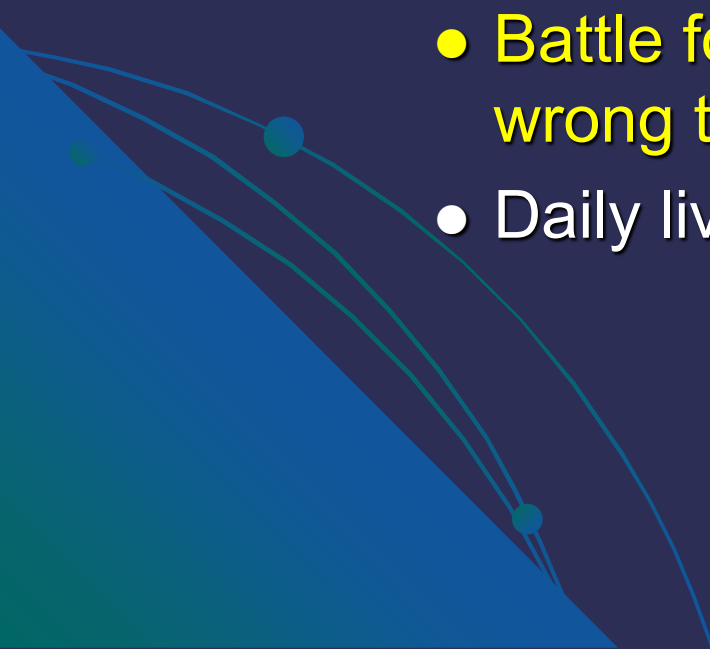


Interest, age, skill



Visual Images Can Be Designed to Fit Problem: “Oppositional”

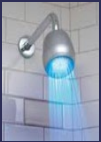
For example: Susan 16- year old having a problem (any age)

- Two parents at odds over parenting
 - Battle for independence over the wrong things
 - Daily living tasks
- 

Susan's Schedule



- _____ Get up on time



- _____ Take a shower



- _____ Get dressed



- _____ Breakfast



- _____ Brush teeth



- _____ Get on van



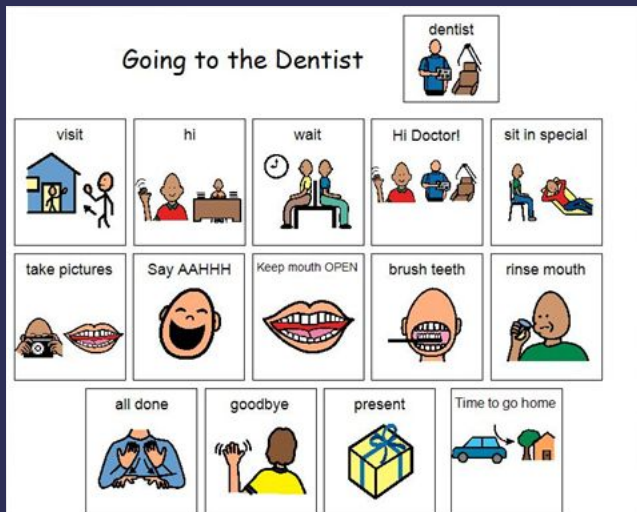
- _____ Do all for

Classic example :Visual lists can be especially helpful to encourage independence

- “The list” tells ‘me’ what to do
- And not mom and dad



Visual maps take you anywhere



We can take advantage 'grooves' and visual skills

- People may get into “bad habits” ...
- Or “good habits” around good food
- Once these habits are set; they will continue



Problems: Bad eating habits

- May be particularly difficult habit to change



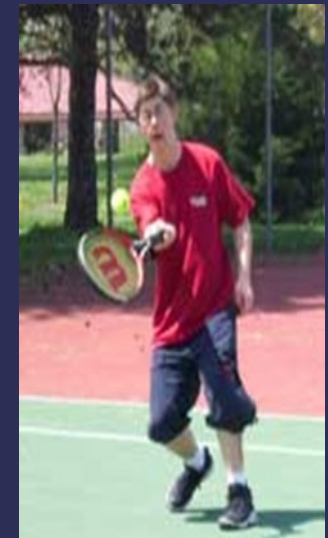
**Lists & pictures are very powerful
and you can use any format**

Breakfast

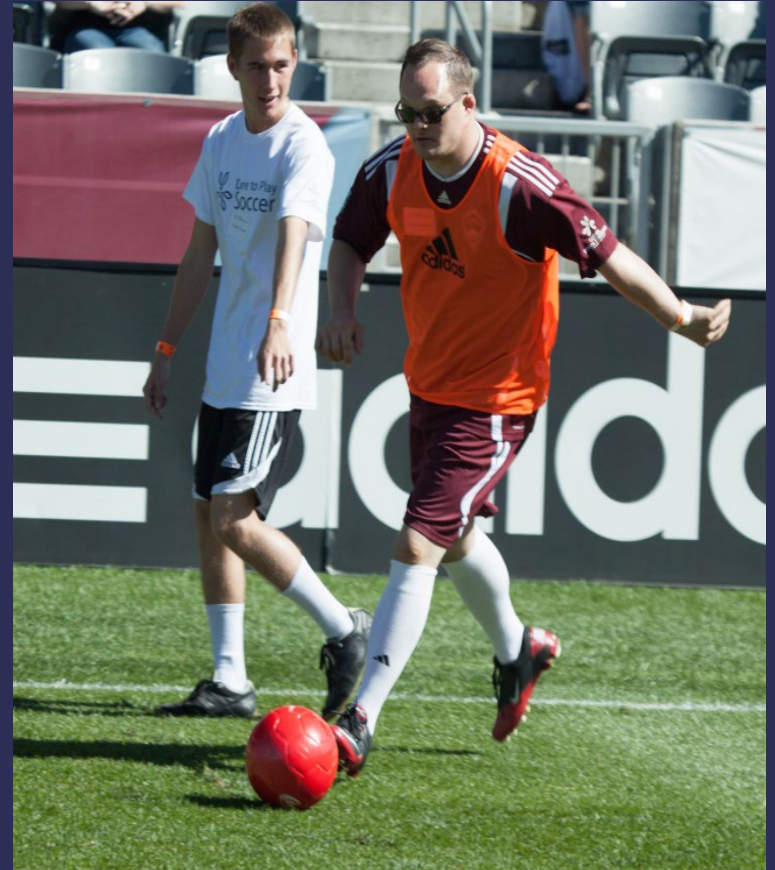
- one egg
- one toast
- Cereal
- Juice



How Do I Get My Son or Daughter To...?


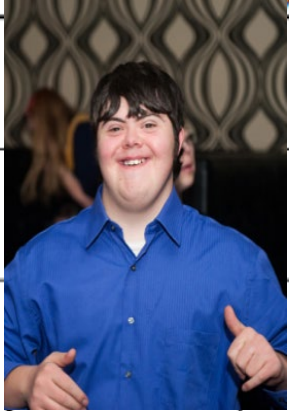
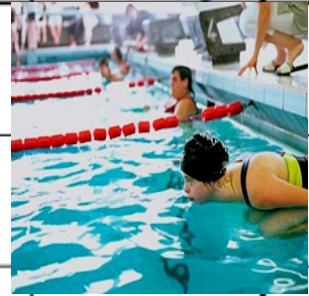
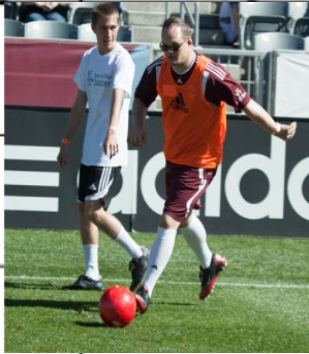


Put Activities on a Calendar, and Go!





WWW.HOOVERWEBDESIGN.COM

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						

NOTES:

Similarly: Problem learning or transferring subtle social skills to a new work or community setting:

Examples:

- **Safety skill in a community setting**
- **Not using key social skills in new job**
- **Being overly friendly or affectionate (hugging) in a work setting**
 - **This is why people lose jobs, not due to job skill**

Problems learning or transferring skills to a new setting

Esp subtle social skills in work or community

ROLE PLAY: incredibly
effective way to learn

- Ironically: The use of the superb visual skills they use to take in the world
- (Which many see acted as “self talk scenes” in private bedrooms)
- Again : Private lab for learning the world



What you can do: Rely on strengths Grooves (concrete) and Visual

Multi-step process

- Role play to build a repertoire (class) of appropriate behavior
- But this will not be enough
- Skills don't readily generalize to new setting
- Need to be taught new skills in the new place
- "Teachable moments" intervening on the spot whenever and wherever the need occurs
- You can also add checklists (power full visual cues)



Use of strengths: to Change a rigid groove



- Analogy: Jet pilots who learn to over-ride panic & unproductive behavior when their plane is in trouble
- **By training over and over to do the right thing...**
- **Role play (the right thing) &**
- **Then enacted/learned in new setting**

Time may be too abstract for people with DS

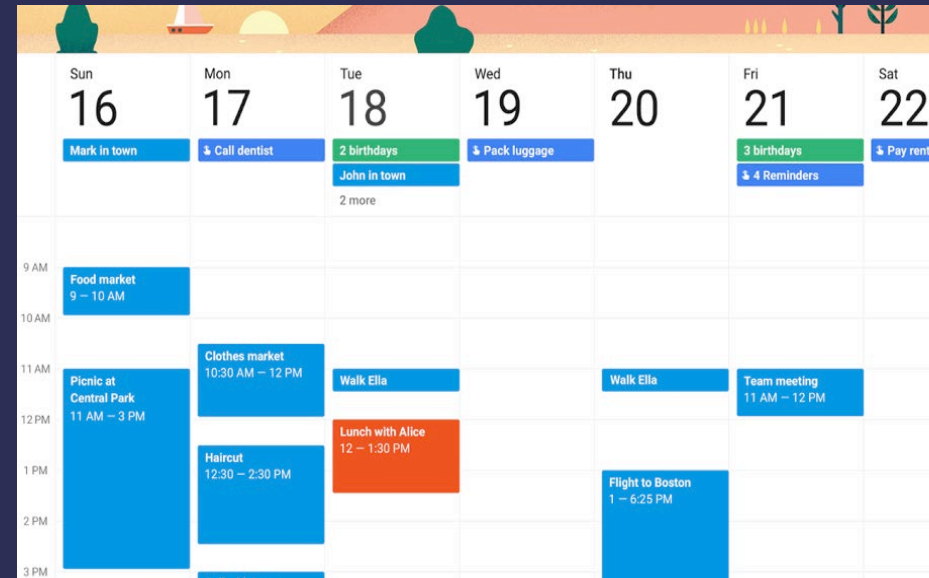
Example: “Are you working?”)

- People get real time: (never miss shows, dinner etc)
- If you put something on a calendar They NEVER Forget
- What to do (use ‘real time’ – concrete visual)
- For example: Use clock hands for a break time not “fifteen minutes” etc
- Use calendar to change a time or put something on a calendar



Why calendars are so popular for people with Down syndrome ?

- Time too abstract
- 5 minutes or 5 years means Nothing
- But people easily memorize a calendar
- Allows them to plan and predict



Great confusion when people talk in present tense about past (or future)

- Example: Yearly meeting “I was beaten”; Very upsetting to staff
- Communication major irritation @ time
- Repetitious questions may result “When do we go to Grandmothers” over and over
- What you can do: Use strength
- Use a calendar (you may choose to not talk but point)
- Timing when to put an event is important may greatly minimize over focus and rumination

Humor & concrete thought

- Many have a wonderful sense of humor

Humor is often a big part of being socially skilled:

For example:

- Playful teasing in a relationship
- Repeating favorite jokes with favorite people



Humor

- Visual humor is big in the world of DS



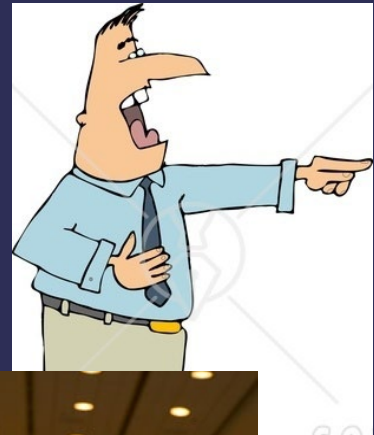
Humor can be a problem

- Humor can be too easily misinterpreted
- As ‘laughing at me’
- Especially when the jokes are too abstract
- Or it can be seen as a criticism or belittling
- When the humor comes from people who are less familiar



Solve this problem

- Be mindful of humor as tricky
- Try not to use jokes that are too abstract
- Sometime too a reassurance that this not about the person with DS can help



Self esteem & competence

- Self esteem usually requires some “**hands on**” success in day to day life



Hands on = Competence

Key concept in
Psychology:

- to do for self,
and
- to gain some
sense of
control and
mastery in our
world



Emphasis on promoting competence throughout the life stages:

- Competence gained by doing ADL's independently
- Starting at an early age
- Continuing through all life stages

