

Activities and ideas for learning at home for children with Down Syndrome



Now is a great time to put all of the skills that have been worked on in school into real life contexts. There is no better learning for our children than “doing” in real life. All students also love to learn through play based activities!! So let’s have some fun while we keep on learning!

Offering choices and empowering your child:

Where you can offer your child choice of activities – probably 2 or 3 is plenty. Offering choice allows your child a sense of responsibility and control over their activities / learning. Using objects or pictures can be useful here – “Would you like _____ or _____?”

Routine / Timetables / Schedules:

Many schools use timetables / schedules to offer a routine for students. Routine is important for children with Down Syndrome. Your child is likely to do best when their day is structured. Try your best to make a routine and to help your child understand what that routine is. To help – keep tasks short and specific – “now it’s time to sweep the floor”. There are lots of good examples of what these might look like online. A good place to find some ideas is Twinkl (which is currently free).

<https://www.twinkl.ie/resources/specialeducationalneeds-sen/specialeducationalneeds-sen-cognition-and-learning/sen-visual-timetables-and-routine>



Learning through helping at home:



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There is so much learning that can be done by helping out around the house and this also develops independence and responsibility.

- **Helping with making meals** - washing and chopping vegetables
- **Baking** – weighing, measuring, pouring, stirring etc - some ideas can be found at this website below:
<https://www.bbcgoodfood.com/howto/guide/cooking-special-needs-children>
- **Unpacking and putting away shopping** – organising into bags and into cupboards and presses
- **Helping to load / unload** - dishwasher, washing machine and drier
- **Taking care of pets** – feeding / walking / washing
- **General household tasks** – Sweeping, mopping, polishing, making their bed, matching socks etc.



Learning through Play:



Learning through Play:

Fine Motor Skills: Engaging in skills dealing with small muscle groups, such as the use of clays and Play-Doh's, building with Lego, or simply playing with water and sand will definitely improve muscles and movements. Some fine motor activity ideas include:

- **Play-Doh** – rolling / pulling / squeezing / pinching
- **Building towers** with large or small bricks – using different colour bricks to encourage choice making and colour recognition
- **Using tweezers** to pick up objects such as cotton wool / small stones – Operation is a great game to play while developing this skill
- **Colouring** – using small thick crayons to colour on different materials e.g. paper or card over sandpaper
- **Hanging up clothes** – helping to hang the clothes out on the line is a great way to practise squeezing
- **Sponges** – squeezing to wring out water is great for strengthening hands and forearms. Children can help to wash the dishes or clean the sinks / baths
- **Popping bubbles** – pop the bubbles on bubble wrap using thumb and index finger or pushing on the bubbles with the sheet on a hard surface
- **Lacing** – pasta, beads or circular breakfast cereal (Cheerios) onto shoelaces.
- **Practise lacing & tying shoes** – tape two different colours onto the end of each lace to help your child know which end to use
- **Cutting and using scissors** – often using card instead of paper helps with practising this skill

Lots more good ideas can be found through the OT Toolbox website: <https://www.theotttoolbox.com>

Gross Motor Skills / Physical Activities: Physical activities are really important for your child's whole body including their mental health. Where it is possible getting out into the garden / park is a great way to practise gross motor skills.

- **Kicking** - a ball with parent / sibling
- **Throwing and catching** - a ball for the dog / parent / sibling
- **Encourage traditional childhood games** – hopscotch, skipping ropes, hula hoops, hide and seek, obstacle courses, follow the leader, stuck in the mud, tag games
- **Nature walk** - spending time outdoors picking the flowers / pointing at the birds / feeling the bark on the trees etc
- **Scooters** – Like cycling great for developing co-ordination and balance. A good pre-skill to learn before cycling. A good parent blog on scooting and cycling - <https://library.down-syndrome.org/en-us/news-update/03/3/learning-ride-bicycle/>
- **Cycling** – A great activity for developing co-ordination and balance – may need a lot of time and practise but absolutely worth the effort. A useful website / blog written a parent of a child with Down Syndrome and their experience with learning to ride a bicycle – <https://www.evanscycles.com/coffeestop/news/learning-to-ride-with-downs-syndrome>
- **Indoor family exercise class** – great for all to get involved – can be led by children or parents. Some YouTube kids exercise videos can be found here: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=body+coach

Lots more good ideas can be found through the OT Mom website:

<https://www.ot-mom-learning-activities.com>

Music & Movement -

- **Dancing** – who doesn't love a good boogie - lots of great dancing / Zumba / yoga activities to be found free through Go Noodle website <https://www.gonoodle.com>
- **Yoga** – many YouTube options for instance: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Kids+yoga

Singing : Music and singing are among the most enjoyable activities for children and particularly children with Down Syndrome. We can teach rhyme, rhythm, language, number and lots more. Some music ideas include:

- **Action Songs** – reinforce language, learning and encourage co-ordination
- **Imagination Songs** – children can make up their own verses for favourite songs / rhymes – for instance “Old MacDonald” or “We’re all going to the Zoo” children can choose all types of wonderful animals to include in this song – make up their own names, sounds, actions
- **Repetition Songs** – singing along with and copying a parent / sibling can aid with working memory and language development
- **Counting Songs** – E.g. “One, two, three four, five once I caught a fish alive” or “Five Little Speckled Frogs”
- **Sequencing Songs** – “There’s a hole in my bucket”

Reading and Language:

- **Photo Album / personal books** – using your photos whether on your phone or in photo albums to identify, name and talk about the photos. *Book Creator* for iPad is just one App that can be a useful tool for helping you to make personalised books from your digital photos. Or often children really enjoy sticking these photos with words (appropriate to the reading level) into scrapbooks and creating their own books
- **Topic Books** – using photos from an activity that was done during the week such as your walk or dancing activity – create books with pictures, words or phrases
- **Games** – matching games, posting games, bingo, lotto – using pictures, words or phrases (depending on stage of learning) of your child’s favourite movie, animals, characters, toys, foods
- **Favourite stories** – Reading, discussing the story / pictures, pointing at the pictures / words all helps to develop a child’s reading and understanding. <https://www.getepic.com/> is currently offering a months free access
- **Reading recipes / timetables / magazines** – Reading is everywhere, so where you can point at familiar words during activities

Maths: Making Maths Real

- **Setting the table** – counting out numbers of forks, plates, glasses etc
- **Matching / Sorting** – socks, shoes, pyjama top and bottoms, cutlery etc
- **Measuring** – for instance, helping to bake, filling the watering can to water the flowers, how long is the garden, my bedroom etc – using hand spans / paces / blocks etc
- **Making towers with blocks / Lego** – Counting, sorting according to colour or size
- **Playing Board games** – E.g. Snakes & Ladders, Ludo, Buckaroo, Pop Up Pirate
- **Playing Skittles** – “How many did we knock down?”, “What colour skittles fell over?”
- **Using calendars / timetables / TV listings** – depending on stage of child this can include – using home-made calendars or timetables to show time of the day and link with child’s daily routine. Start with days of the week with a photograph and written word representing activity associated with each day. Working out how long their favourite TV Programme is, what time it starts / finishes at – reading the clock etc. -
- **Playing shopping games** – using real money to learn about exchanging money for items. Having your child be the shopkeeper finding the item in your “kitchen shop” and taking money / giving change.
- **Top Marks** - is a great website to access maths (as well as other curricular areas) online interactive games <https://www.topmarks.co.uk/>

Art: is proven to have many therapeutic effects. It encourages sensory experiences – touch, sight, smell. Art offers language and communication opportunities, as well as developing fine motor skills.

Below are some ideas for easy to do art at home:



Other simple ideas can be found at: <https://www.happinessishomemade.net/quick-easy-kids-crafts-anyone-can-make/>

Tape Art:

Here's what you need:

- Painter's tape / Sellotape, cut into short and varying lengths
- Washable paints
- Paintbrushes
- Card or paper

1. Help children to use the tape to make designs on the paper.
2. Have the child paint over the tape and allow to dry.
3. Show them how to remove the tape to reveal the design.

Modification ideas: Use sponges instead of paintbrushes, or make shapes or letters with the tape. If children are having trouble using both hands, tape the paper to the table.

Colourful Leaves:

Here's what you need:

- Leaves (possibly picked up during a nature walk)
- Paint of any colour
- Plate

1. Lay a leaf out flat.
2. Pour paint onto paper plates (one colour per plate)
3. Dip and cover the ridged side in paint
4. Press leaf (paint side down) onto the paper
5. Continue with different leaves / colours

Name Decorating:

Here's what you need:

- Glue sticks
- Paper or card
- Pom-poms, buttons, glitter, pasta etc

1. Write the child's name with a glue stick on the sheet of paper.
2. The child can then stick the items collected glitter etc over the glue outline.
3. Allow to dry.

Modification ideas: Allow the child to write their own name. Cut out and stick onto another piece of card as a nice label for their bedroom door.

Shaving cream Masterpieces:

Here's what you need:

- Shaving foam
- Food colouring (might stain hands) or paint
- Tray (disposable is best)
- Paper or card

1. Squirt the shaving foam into the disposable tray.
2. Mix with favourite colour- paint or food colouring
3. Have fun watching as foam and colour mix
4. Print hands onto card / paper
5. Allow to dry

