The pupil with Down syndrome may display a range of challenging behaviours. A comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the pupil, and a proactive approach will assist the pupil to develop some sense of control over their behaviour. However, there will be some behaviour that will require planned, conscious response/s. The strategies below offer a number of responses that will have varying degrees of success with the pupil with Down syndrome.

STRATEGIES

1. Using Distraction/Redirection

Distraction can be a powerful tool when a pupil has become non-compliant. The following strategies may help to 'change' the thought pattern and redirect the pupil and avoid a 'power struggle'

• use singing/humming
• use humour — particularly ‘slap stick’
• make a game of it - 'I do it - you do it'
• pretend it's' too hard, need help'
• pretend you heard something - 'did you hear the helicopter?'
• have something novel in your bag/work box, desk - 'Look what I've got.....'

It is often effective to ignore nominated behaviours that are irritating, attention getters and disruptive. This is often referred to as 'selective ignoring'.

Note: The Special Education Support Service wishes to acknowledge and thank Fidelma Brady, former Education Officer with Down Syndrome Ireland, for permission to use this information.
REMEMBER: ignoring is not appropriate - when it may place the pupil with Down syndrome or peers at risk

(Adapted from Behaviour Management ~ Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc)

2. Ignoring

The following process is recommended:

• do not give attention to the pupil, this includes verbal reprimand and eye contact

• praise other pupils for appropriate behaviour

• remove books/equipment from work area

• set up pupil’s favoured activity (class game/song), involve the whole class, invite pupil with Down syndrome to join in 'when you have .......'

• if in 1:1 situation, pretend to be very busy

Give the pupil positive attention the moment the behaviour stops e.g. 'I like the way you are sitting with your hand in your lap.' Do not describe or give verbal attention to the inappropriate behaviour e.g. 'I'm glad you have stopped playing with Mary's hair.'

3. Consequences

The use of natural consequences will have more meaning to the pupil than an unrelated applied consequences. Where possible these natural consequences should be implemented immediately. State the expected behaviour. Do not paraphrase or change the instruction.

'Be a broken record'.

• 'When you finished work, go to break'

• 'Work not finished, no break '

NB: Ensure work set is within reasonable expectations, you may need to reduce the expectations. Loss of Privileges: These need to be related to the situation, and immediately applied whenever possible.
4. 'Grandparent's Rule'

This is an easy means of getting pupils to undertake 'unpleasant' tasks. Remember Grandparent's rule .... "When you've eaten your carrots, you can have some cake!"

Example

"When you have completed the four sums, you can use the computer."

Do not reverse the rule by allowing pupils to use the computer if they promise to complete the four maths sums afterwards. This reversal is frequently used in the form of.... "OK, if you promise to behave in Assembly, you can use the activity now for 10 minutes ". THIS IS NOT AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY!!!

5. Using Positive Consequences or Reinforcers

Planned Contingency Management Programs

This strategy requires teachers to immediately reinforce appropriate behaviour by using social reinforcers (compliments, smiles, thumbs up gestures) and/or a point or token system. Research shows that reinforcing academic performance rather than behaviour is more effective in changing behaviour for children with complex learning and behavioural difficulties than reinforcing behaviour alone.

(Adapted from Behaviour Management ~ Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc)

Another effective strategy is to target specific behaviour that needs changing and positively reinforce when they merely 'come close' to behaving appropriately (Shaping). Pupils with complex learning and behavioural difficulties live in a world of reprimands - they need to know what, when, and how they are doing it right. Appropriate behaviour may be rare, but it is important to find it and reinforce it!!! When?

- Most effective immediately following the behaviour
- Frequently - these pupils need continual feedback
- Following even the smallest steps towards improvement
• Acknowledge each little stage no matter how small and insignificant it may seem. "When you’ve completed the project, you can have “free time” is often too big a step and too far into the future for some pupils.

For some pupils you may need to provide positive feedback for things that we normally take for granted!

• Preparing the page correctly
• Gathering together their pens, pencils and correct books. Acknowledge appropriate behaviour - not just academic performance.

6. Token Systems

A number of pupils with Down syndrome will need extrinsic motivation to ‘kick start’ their interest and in turn, enjoyment/participation on various schooling activities. Token systems can be an effective way of changing behaviour in the short term. However, it needs to be part of a broader plan of skill teaching and social development of the individual.

The following process is recommended:

• select the behaviour to be changed. Describe the behaviour in simple terms to the pupil e.g. ‘You get 2 tokens for putting your pencils away’
• establish a list of appropriate rewards e.g. toys, McDonald's voucher, listen to music. These rewards will need to be rotated frequently
• make the initial target reward easily obtainable
• ‘shift the goal posts’ once the pupil has mastered the process
• represent this pictorially.

Aim to fade the token system once the target behaviour has become automatic.

(Adapted from Behaviour Management ~ Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc)

7. Praise
Remember to continue to use descriptive praise e.g. "Excellent writing on the line."

8. Lead Time Give lead time in concrete terms e.g. "Finish writing two more words and you can use computer" or "Put the blocks away and go to break."

9. Using Picture Teaching Cards

The use of pictures to reinforce appropriate behaviour has been very successful with a number of pupils with Down syndrome.

Picture cards provide:

• a visual representation of appropriate behaviour (visual memory is a strength)

• a portable reminder for the pupil to refer to during the day

• a pictorial strategy for helping the pupil to understand off-task and on-task behaviour

Pictures can be drawn, photographs, or whatever is appropriate for the pupil and/or setting.

Have a picture of inappropriate behaviour. Mark the inappropriate behaviour with a large 'X',

• write underneath 'No rolling' (or targeted behaviour), on mat'.

On flip side of picture, have appropriate behaviour. Mark with large tick.

(Adapted from Behaviour Management ~ Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc)

When using the card begin by: Stating the behaviour illustrated on the card Example: "Look, Peter rolling on floor" Remember to use concise 'keyword' sentences. Ask pupil to restate the behaviour Example: "What is Peter doing?" State how other pupils/teacher feels in the picture (if this is relevant to developmental level) Example: "Look, Mrs Smith is angry" Look at picture of appropriate behaviour. State behaviour. Example: "Look, Peter sitting up" "Excellent sitting up on mat" "Mrs Smith is happy" NB: Language models and complexity of pictures will need to be adapted / modified to suit each individual.
The inclusion of 'feelings' may be beyond some pupil's initially and it may be only possible to focus on the 'behaviour'.

The card/s need to be kept in an accessible place. Multiple copies may need to be made for other subject teachers.

Review the card/s daily for a minimum for two weeks when implementing the plan. During the day the card may serve as a reminder/prompt, without necessitating a verbal discussion.

Keep the focus on the appropriate behaviour reinforcement and encouragement consistent

(Adapted from Behaviour Management ~ Down Syndrome Society of South Australia Inc)