

# Development in practice - Speech and language activities for preschool children with Down syndrome

Two reviews of a new video resource that explains and demonstrates activities for promoting communication, speech and language development for preschool children with Down syndrome.

## 1) Leela Baksi

Down Syndrome Education International has produced another valuable resource for families and practitioners that raises expectations about the potential for very young children who have Down syndrome to use speech and signing for communication.

The 76 minute DVD sets out to explain and demonstrate activities that help preschool children with Down Syndrome to learn to talk, and shows them having fun while they're doing it. The DVD consists of 6 chapters:

- Learning to talk;
- Learning to understand words;
- Communicating what you know;
- Learning to say words;
- Teaching reading to teach talking; and
- Final comments.

These are illustrated through sequences of parents and children playing and talking together, and some shots of group activities lead by staff at The Sarah Duffen Centre. A voice-over gives advice about strategies that support young children who have Down syndrome and draws attention to how parents implement these. While the DVD pack does not include a booklet of written information, a transcript of the voice over can be downloaded from [www.downsided.org](http://www.downsided.org) for reference. At the end of each chapter, a screen appears summing up points covered, for example, "Interpret and reward your child's attempts to communicate – especially any sounds".

The parents (including one dad) provide fantastic models of sensitive interaction with their children, clear and accurate signing, and responsive support for their children. While the recordings were

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advise, "Involve (children) in everyday activities, talk to them about what they are doing and what they can see, and to read books with them." and recommends that families "give some time on a daily basis to use the activities in this film".

The DVD provides an overview of a range of activities, rather than detailed instructions. We believe most families will require further assistance to set up and develop activities, addressing issues such as how to support children to start to engage in structured tasks, and adapting the strategies so that they appeal and are appropriate to an individual child, as well emotional support, encouragement and reassurance.

For families looking for guidance on exactly what activities to do, how to carry them out, and how to incorporate them into everyday life, there remains a need for development of further resources that provide more detailed information on specific strategies using video footage, showing hierarchies of tasks and illustrating progress made by individuals over time.

While the voice-over acknowledges that children develop at different rates, and speech may emerge later for some children who have Down syndrome, families of children whose development has been affected by greater challenges with, for example, health issues, hearing impairment or motor impairment, may find it hard to watch these very young children using speech and sentences, and reading. These families may experience greater difficulty in translating the advice into appropriate activities for their children.

Families who use different interaction styles with their children, from different parts of the UK, and from different social and cultural backgrounds may not identify with the scenarios shown. I hope that resources will be developed with other communities/groups of families to address this.

The voice-over refers to other sources produced by Down Syndrome Education International, some of which are listed in the final chapter as “sources of further information”, and it would be helpful to see these resources when viewing the DVD, including the picture lotto games, See and Learn resources, examples of completed vocabulary checklists, and the Early Support Developmental Journal.

We recommend this resource as a learning tool for people who want to know about how to support preschool children

who have Down syndrome, including Portage workers, speech and language therapists, preschool provision staff and all others involved in supporting young children who have Down syndrome. In our experience, families often report that they are unable to access well-informed support and this DVD will help to address this problem.

We recommend that families have access to services provided by practitioners with specialist knowledge about Down syndrome, as well as using the DVD as a source of information and inspiration.

Leela Baksi is a Speech and Language Therapist (Senior Clinical Specialist - Special Needs) at Symbol UK Ltd, speech and language therapy advisors to the Down's Syndrome Association. This review incorporates feedback from the staff team delivering specialist services for children and adults who have Down syndrome.

## 2) Kate Freeman

This very informative DVD is aimed at parents of young children with Down Syndrome and focuses on demystifying terms and techniques around communication development as well as demonstrating useful activities.

The whole film is 76 minutes long and is divided into chapters which discuss how children learn to talk; learning to understand; communicating what you know; sound skills; and reading for language. It would be an excellent training resource for support groups or for parents to view at home.

Information is given on difficulties that children with Down syndrome face in developing communication as well as the strengths that can be used to help develop this area. Key skills are identified for each area and activities are demonstrated with 2 – 4 year old children and their parents. The activities are easily repeatable at home and information about how to access further resources is given. The reasons behind the activities are also discussed, as well as an explanation of how to move from one stage to another.

The commentary is clear and the filming excellent. There is also a written summary at the end of each section to reinforce what has been shown. I would certainly recommend this DVD as a way of introducing the issues, demonstrating activities and reinforcing information given through speech and language therapy and education services.

Kate Freeman is a Professional Advisor at I CAN. I CAN works to support the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children with a special focus on those who find this hard: children with speech, language and communication needs. See [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

### FURTHER INFORMATION

*Development in Practice: Activities for preschool children with Down syndrome* can be ordered at [www.downsed.org](http://www.downsed.org) for £15.90.

A full transcript of the voice-over of the film is available at [www.downsed.org/practice/transcripts](http://www.downsed.org/practice/transcripts)

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