



# The Inclusive Central Texas Congregation

2008

## Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas

*"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."*

1 Samuel 16:2-7

*"Inclusion begins in our hearts. It begins with affirmation. We should open our hearts to one another and recognize the strengths of every person...When we open our hearts and our community to the gifts each person brings, we are all strengthened."*

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin

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### Families of Children with Special Needs Need the Church

In 2005, the Census Bureau reported that 37.5 million people, or 14 percent of the total population aged 5 and over, have a "disability." Most people automatically think of a condition that makes it impossible or difficult to accomplish life's basic activities. However, it has been asserted that most damaging consequence for children with challenges was not their original disability, but rather "how the disability changes the way the child participates in the activities of his or her culture."

If we as a society make adaptations and modifications, we can bring out the "abilities" in all! For example, we can help a person in a wheelchair be more "able" if we install graded curbs and ramps.

Each of us is created in God's image and is to be valued. You have the ability to provide ministry support and equal opportunity to people with disabilities to participate in society and the faith community.

### People First Language

It is important to be cognizant of the language we use, particularly in referring to people with disabilities, since our language reflects our beliefs and thoughts. The concept of "People First Language" recognizes each person and the humanity of each individual.

In your language, put the person before the disability ("a child with Down syndrome" rather than "a Downs kid").

Research indicates that when a child with disabilities is born into a family their first initial contacts for assistance are within their immediate family, the medical community, and their church community.

Families who have religious ties tend to have better coping skills in dealing with the added stress that can sometimes be associated with rearing a child who has special needs.

Families who have children with special needs need your church to:

1. Extend an invitation to join or visit your church;
2. Create or publicize programs for their children;
3. Develop strategies that will enable them to apply religious practice into the daily lives of their children;
4. Reassure them that your congregation will embrace, value and welcome their children;
5. Ensure them that their children will be safe and happy in your programs; and

6. Proclaim your congregation's belief that all children are deserving of the joy and hope that faith brings.

The Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas (DSACT) is proud to partner with you in this important endeavor to increase inclusion in places of worship. Additional materials and resources can be found on our website at [www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com), or you can call our office at (512) 323-0808 to schedule a presentation.



Hannah, 2

Avoid terms with obvious negative connotations, such as "retarded."

"Developmentally Delayed" is preferable to potentially offensive words like "mentally retarded" or "disabled."

Describe people without disabilities as "typically developing" rather than "normal."

Use emotionally neutral expressions (i.e., a person "has" Down syndrome, rather than "suffers from," or "afflicted with.")

If you aren't sure how to refer to the individual's condition, ask the family.



Texas Governor Rick Perry with Stone, 3 and Patrick, 3

### About Down Syndrome

Down syndrome is the most common chromosomal abnormality in humans. Down syndrome was first described by Dr. John Langdon Down in 1866. We use the term "Down syndrome" as opposed to "Down's syndrome" because Dr. Down did not *have* Down syndrome and he did not *own* Down syndrome.

Down syndrome occurs in approximately 1 of every 733 live births. There are over 350,000 people with Down syndrome in the United States alone. It occurs in males and females evenly, and is not related to race, nationality, religion or socioeconomic status.

While the age of the mother can be a factor, 80% of people with Down syndrome are born to parents under the age of 35, with the average age being 26. Nothing that a parent did or did not do during the pregnancy causes the baby to have Down syndrome.

There is an estimated 90 percent termination rate among prenatally diagnosed cases of Down syndrome in this country. In 2007, the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology issued two practice bulletins (77 and 88), which call for early and universal screening of all pregnant women. The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) condemns ACOG's recommendations that

convey tacit approval for terminating pregnancies where the fetus has Down syndrome.

To have any child is a gift from God. Having a child with Down syndrome may be a different gift than parents had in mind.

Children with Down syndrome may require more patience, time, money, and tears. For many, such a gift sounds scary, but if raised in a loving home, a child with Down syndrome will show his family a more complete meaning of love and devotion than they have ever imagined.

**The termination rate for prenatally diagnosed pregnancies with Down syndrome is approximately 90%.**

### About the Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas

Established in 1991, DSACT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization committed to spreading awareness and educating its membership and the general public about Down syndrome.

Our **Vision** is a world in which all members are accepted, valued for their uniqueness, respected for their abilities and contributions, and assured the opportunity and choice to create their own path to fulfillment and success.

Our **Mission** is to provide education, support, and resources to individuals with Down syndrome, their families, professionals, and the community, while building public awareness and acceptance.

Our **Priorities** include programming, caregiver support, public education, awareness, inclusion, advocacy, and communication.

Upon request, a DSACT member can make a presentation to members of your congregation or your Sunday School Classes about Down syndrome and inclusion.

You can view more information about this and other DSACT projects on our website at [www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com). Please feel free to call our office at 323-0808 to speak with a DSACT representative or schedule a presentation today!

### Myths vs. Facts

**Myth: People with DS are severely retarded.**

Most individuals have IQs that fall in the mild to moderate range of retardation. Research is making great strides in identifying the genes that cause the characteristics of Down syndrome. Scientists now feel strongly that it will be possible to improve, correct or prevent many of the problems associated with Down syndrome in the future.

**Myth: People with DS must be placed in segregated programs.**

Children with Down syndrome have been included in regular academic classrooms in schools across the country. Many learn to read prior to kindergarten.

Many are fully included in school and are active participants in the vocational, social and recreational activities of the community.

**Myth: People with DS will never grow up to be independent.**

Many adults with Down syndrome will attend college, obtain employment, marry, drive, and live independently.

Businesses are seeking adults with Down syndrome for a variety of positions. They bring to their jobs enthusiasm, reliability, and dedication.



Austin Mayor Will Wynn with Liliana, 6

### The Inclusive Sunday School Class

Maria Montessori recognized that by placing children of differing ages in a classroom together, all children learned more. The same principles apply with inclusion. Typically developing children will learn acceptance, cooperation, creativity and new skills. Children with special needs begin accomplishing many tasks at a much higher level, in great part because they are exposed to children accomplishing tasks at those levels.

Books to introduce all children to Down syndrome:

- *My Friend Isabelle*, by Eliza Woloson
- *Be Good to Eddie Lee*, by Virginia Fleming

Here are some tips to increase the success of children with Down syndrome:

- Use hands-on materials and experiences.
- Allow extra time for them to complete tasks, and provide increased opportunities for practice.
- Use patience, and attempt to increase the child's comfort level.
- If the child uses sign language, ask the parents to teach you a few signs.
- Be as concrete as possible. Use demonstrations, visual aids, and pictures. Break tasks into small steps and demonstrate each step.
- Allow extra time and more opportunities for practice.
- Recognize that a child may not be "ignoring" your instructions, but may not be able to hear you. Place the child near you, and speak directly to him. Use gestures and facial expressions.
- Rephrase and repeat questions or instructions often.
- Some children are sensitive to loud sounds. Be aware of the noise levels.
- Place those with vision problems near you. Use larger font, and incorporate visual aids.
- Encourage independence.
- Use peer buddies when appropriate.
- Keep age, attention span, and abilities in mind.

***But Jesus called for them, saying, "Permit the children to come to Me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.***

- Luke 18:16

### Positive Behavior Supports for Children with Down Syndrome

In terms of behavior and personality, individuals with Down syndrome vary just as widely as their peers. Most are sociable and well-behaved.

The most common form of inappropriate behavior in all children, including those with Down syndrome, is behavior designed to gain attention. Sometimes they will misbehave because they are angry or frustrated. Sometimes children with Down syndrome may

appear to misbehave when they are, in reality, just confused or uncertain about what they are supposed to do, or their immaturity may lead to behaviors more appropriate of a younger child.

According to a study conducted nationally, the most effective technique for behavior management is praise.

The following methods are sometimes effective: material

rewards, time out, peer pressure, loss of privileges, and contact with parents.

The following are NOT effective for children with Down syndrome: ignoring the behavior, reprimands, or punishment.

DSACT hosts periodic *free* workshops on Behavior Management. For more details or to schedule a workshop for your volunteers, contact us at 323-0808 or [info@dsact.com](mailto:info@dsact.com).



Berkeley, 2

### Tips for Including Individuals with Down Syndrome in your Faith Community

Include individuals with Down syndrome as ushers, musicians, altar servers, gift bearers, and lectors.

Train ushers and lay leaders as role models to include and welcome individuals with Down syndrome and their families.

Create a committee on inclusion or place an "inclusion box" in the church with paper and

pencils for suggestions for better inclusion.

Educate the congregation about disability issues by periodically running pieces in your bulletin.

Reinterpret disability narratives in the scriptures as "healing" not "curing" stories or reference biblical leaders who had disabilities in homilies and sermons.

Celebrate World Down Syndrome Awareness Day (March 21).

Observe National Down Syndrome Awareness Month (October).

Adapted from "Creating Access and Inclusion in Worship," Pathways Awareness Foundation.

<http://www.inclusioninworship.org/>

***Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.***

- Galatians 6:10

**Down Syndrome Association of  
Central Texas**

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E-mail: [info@dsact.com](mailto:info@dsact.com)



Our vision is a world in which all members, including those with Down syndrome, are accepted, valued for their uniqueness, respected for their abilities and contributions, and assured the opportunity and choice to create their own path to fulfillment and success.

*DSACT is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.*

To obtain more information, make a donation, or volunteer contact President Lori Tullos Barta at [ltullos@dsact.com](mailto:ltullos@dsact.com) or 771-6081.

Find More Information and Resources at  
[www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com)

## Additional Resources

### Organizations

National Organization on Disability  
Religion and Disability Program  
910 16th Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20096  
(202) 293-5960 - voice

National Catholic Office for Persons  
with Disability  
P. O. Box 29113  
Washington, DC 20017  
(202) 529-2933 - voice/TTY

Union of American Hebrew Congrega-  
tions  
Liheyot Advisory Committee  
838 5th Avenue  
New York, NY 10021-7064  
(212) 650-4075 - voice

ADA Packet – Parish Awareness  
Packet, etc.  
National Organization on Disability  
202-293-5960 (Tel) 202-293-5968

Joni and Friends International Disability  
Center  
P.O. Box 3333  
Agoura Hills, CA 91376  
[www.joniandfriends.org](http://www.joniandfriends.org)

### Websites

Bible Lessons for Persons with Cognitive Disabilities  
(FREE)  
<http://jeffmcnair.com/Biblelessons/index.htm>

Lesson Plans on Inclusion (FREE)  
[http://www.inclusioninworship.org/open\\_educators.php](http://www.inclusioninworship.org/open_educators.php)

Open Hearts Open Minds Open Doors Inclusive Toolkit  
[http://www.inclusioninworship.org/open\\_faith\\_community.php](http://www.inclusioninworship.org/open_faith_community.php)

Opening Doors to All God's People (FREE)  
Resource guide containing a disabilities checklist/litany.  
[http://www.crcna.org/pages/disability\\_access.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/disability_access.cfm)

Down Syndrome Association of Central Texas  
512-323-0808  
[www.dsact.com](http://www.dsact.com)

National Down Syndrome Congress  
1-800-232-6372  
[www.ndscenter.org](http://www.ndscenter.org)

National Down Syndrome Society  
1-800-221-4602  
[www.ndss.org](http://www.ndss.org)

National Association for Down Syndrome  
1-630-325-9112  
[www.nads.org](http://www.nads.org)

The Down Syndrome Educational Trust  
[www.downs-syndrome.org.uk](http://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk)

### Books

[Let all the Children Come to Me: A Practical Guide to Including Children with Disabilities in Your Church Ministries](#), by MaLesia Breeding, Dana Hood & Jerry Whitworth (2006)

[Gifts: How Children with Down Syndrome have Enriched our Lives](#), edited by Kathryn Lynard Soper

[Understanding How Children with Down Syndrome and Other Developmental Delays Learn](#) by Susan J. Peoples