

# Unit 8: Promoting Positive Behaviour and Social Skills

## a) Behaviour

As for any pupil who may be exhibiting some behaviours which are interfering with progress in school, it is always essential to work on developing those skills which the pupil has already learned which are what are wanted in school to enable students to progress both in learning and social situations.

Issues for primary schools about behaviour for pupils with DS are generally associated around the following areas:

- **Social Skills** – do these need to be taught specifically? What factors need to be taken into account – might the pupil be responding at a developmental level which is younger than his/her chronological age? Does the pupil have the spoken language and understanding to know how to respond in different situations? Do these need to be specifically taught?
- **Learning routines** – does the pupil understand what is expected or how to behave around school areas – corridors, classrooms, hall, canteen, school grounds? Does the pupil understand the rules that govern how to behave in class?
- **Differentiation** – is the work too hard or too easy?
- **Friendships** – how to develop and maintain across the Key Stages. Often the pupil with DS is the most popular child in the class and it can be overwhelming at playtime because so many children want to play with him/her.
- **Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)** – what is acceptable behaviour in school? Does the pupil need to be taught about public and private places and public and private parts of the body as well as what relationships are all about? (See Unit on SRE).
- **Using support** – pupils with DS usually have a high level of TA support which can make it difficult to develop independence and to have space to 'chill out', relax, and be with peers and friends. Too much adult support can often trigger negative behaviours. Getting the balance right is the skill – remember developing independence matched to pupils needs should be aimed for in all areas of school life.

Behaviour difficulties are not part of the specific learning profile for pupils with DS nor are there any behaviour problems unique to pupils with Down syndrome. However, much of their behaviour will be related to their frustration in not being able to communicate their feelings and needs through well formed sentences, and to their level of development. Knowledge and understanding of the specific learning profile for pupils with DS is vital as this impinges on why behaviour difficulties may occur, how we manage the behaviour, and how we create strategies for the pupil to enable them to be successful in promoting positive models of behaviour.

In particular we need to teach skills to develop language (see Unit on language development); remember that the listening memory is poor so verbal instructions will not be remembered or understood; that pupils who can't hear will miss vital words/phrases and meaning will be further impaired; that poor vision also interferes with seeing what a situation is. We need to always remember to use visual strategies and to understand the frustrations that can be caused through having a learning and language disability.

Many pupils with DS will not present with behaviour problems or if they do they will be around a particular issue. Some pupils with DS will have behaviour which will require an individual behaviour programme. A few pupils will present with challenging behaviour for much of the time – these pupils may also have a dual diagnosis e.g. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or may have Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) or be somewhere along the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

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To sum up, pupils with DS have grown up having to cope with more difficulties than many of their peers. Much of what they are expected to do in their everyday lives will have been much harder to accomplish due to problems with their speech and language, auditory short-term memory, motor co-ordination, shorter concentration span and learning difficulties. The thresholds that trigger problem behaviours may therefore be lower than with their typically developing peers, i.e. they are likely to become frustrated or anxious more easily. Therefore, whilst having DS does not lead inevitably to behavioural problems, the nature of it makes pupils more vulnerable to the development of inappropriate behaviours.

Many pupils with DS are quick to learn expectations of behaviour in different situations within school and learn classroom and school rules well (and often try to enforce them within the rest of their class!). Where pupils with DS do have difficulties with behaviour the situation needs to be taken in context and analysed as to why this may be happening. Behaviour is on track when the pupil is not distracted by something else, understands what is required, feels secure in knowing that he/she can do what is asked, the task is not too easy and not too hard and there is a reward for completing the task.

Pupils with DS often develop avoidance strategies. Research has shown that, like many pupils with special needs, those with DS tend to adopt such strategies, which undermine the progress of their learning. Some pupils tend to use social behaviours e.g. talking about a favourite DVD, to distract adult attention and avoid learning, or seem prepared to work only on tasks which fall within a very narrowly defined cognitive range. In Key Stage 2, the increasing cognitive demands of the National Curriculum will often be at the root of inappropriate behaviour. Recognition of this is critical in responding to behaviour problems.

It is important to remain alive to the possibility of avoidance, to separate immature behaviour from deliberately inappropriate behaviour, and to ensure that the pupils' developmental, not chronological, age is taken into account, together with their level of verbal understanding. Any reward offered also has to take account of these factors and be rewarding for the pupil, so class rewards may need to be individualized to the pupil e.g. using stickers that reflect the pupil's favourite interest rather than class stickers, stars or points. It is also very important to treat the pupil as a child who needs treating with respect, and talked to in a chronologically age appropriate manner. Any materials used should also be appropriate for a child of this age.

It is also important to be aware of how other pupils and staff treat the pupil with DS. Sometimes behaviours are accepted 'because the pupil has DS' and the pupil is allowed to behave in ways that other pupils aren't. This is not only not in the pupil's best interests but it also can alienate other pupils who may feel that unfair treatment is being given. Pupils with DS are quite capable of understanding school rules and consequences as well as rewards. So their behaviour if inappropriate needs to be dealt with in the same way as for typically developing peers but with allowances made because of their special educational needs.

In inclusive Primary schools the behaviour of the pupil(s) with DS present in the same way as in any other school but the attitude of the school ensures that the behaviours are not seen as a problem but instead are understood in the context of the specific learning profile, and in particular, in terms of their language profile.

Behaviours generally should not be seen as a problem but instead be understood in relation to the specific learning profile and, in particular, to the specific language profile for pupils with DS. Schools can then develop positive strategies for helping pupils to change their behaviours and staff can be helped to understand the reasons behind any presenting behaviours.

By far the majority of pupils with DS will be well behaved in school and setting good examples for other pupils, being able to ignore the sometimes challenging behaviours of typically developing pupils as well as other SEN pupils. The pupils with DS will often be good role models in behaviour for other pupils in school.

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*'S has settled in very well in school and there are no behaviour issues. His behaviour is described as 'very good.'*

*'Behaviour management has worked well – school have learned and built on what interventions work best.'*

### Strategies

- Ensure that all staff are aware of the specific learning profile for children with DS and that they understand how this relates to the pupil whom they teach.
- Ensure the rules are clear and visually represented.
- Ensure that all teaching and non-teaching staff are aware that the pupil with DS must be disciplined at all times along with their peers, and are aware of the strategies to be employed.
- Ensure that all staff are firm and consistent at all times.
- Agree the name of a key person who will act as first point of contact in cases of difficulty.
- Ensure that the pupil, staff and peers know the contact person, what procedure to follow and where to go if there's a problem.
- Use short, clear instructions and clear body language for reinforcement: over long explanations and excessively complex reasoning are not appropriate.
- Distinguish the "can't" do from the "won't do".
- Investigate any inappropriate behaviour, asking yourself why the pupil is acting so. For example:
  - Is the task too hard or too easy?
  - Is the task too long?
  - Is the work suitably differentiated?
  - Does the pupil understand what is expected?
- Ignore attention-seeking behaviour within reasonable limits: it is aimed to distract.
- Reinforce the desired behaviour immediately with visual, oral or tangible rewards.
- Ensure that the TA is not the only adult having to deal with the behaviour. The class teacher has ultimate responsibility.
- Ensure the pupil is working with peers who are acting as good role models both for learning and behaviour. This might mean seating the pupil with DS at a table with more able peers.
- The pupil should be taught the behavioural expectations for all pupils within the school and consequences for behaviour should fall within this, taking into account the specific strengths and weaknesses of the learning profile of pupils with DS.
- Consequences should be as immediate as possible so that the pupil understands why he/she is receiving a consequence and also tailored to the pupils' level of ability.
- Any consequence should be run alongside strategies that will promote positive behaviours. These should always be clear, visual and easily achievable.
- Rewards should be individual to the pupil and motivating for them.
- Use a visual approach, simple language, social stories and plenty of praise for success!
- Use small group work to teach appropriate language in different school and home situations and teach pupils with DS which words staff might use which mean praise (You're doing well) or sanctions (You're not doing well).
- School made board games can be very effective in reinforcing school rules and appropriate behaviours.

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### b) Causes of inappropriate behaviour

Over the years children with DS are sometimes described as typically affectionate and stubborn. Actually not all children with DS show these traits and may be either introverted or extroverted just as typically developing children. They have commonly been seen as task evaders and as reliant on familiar routines. While all these characteristics are undoubtedly found in some young people with DS, they are learned behaviours, not an inevitable part of their syndrome.

Research suggests that the behaviour of children with DS tends to improve with age but that 11-15% will have persistent behavioural problems through childhood and adolescence.

Some children with DS experience high levels of anxiety. As a consequence they may feel a need to cling to routines and rituals to bring a sense of predictability to their lives and hence reduce their anxiety.

Others are affected by autism or attention deficit disorder which will influence their social development and make them more difficult to manage than other children with DS alone. However, many of the behaviours characteristics of these conditions are also found in children with particularly delayed language and cognitive skills, so care should be taken in diagnosis.

The most common form of inappropriate behaviour in all children is behaviour designed to gain attention. Children with DS may be particularly attention-seeking because:

- They enjoy being the centre of attention and dislike being ignored or having to wait their turn.
- They see others getting what they want by being difficult.
- They have been successful in using attention-seeking behaviour in the past to get their own way or avoid work.
- Sometimes children will misbehave because they are angry or frustrated.
- They may find that the work they are being given is too difficult, too easy or just boring.
- They may get annoyed when other people don't take the time to understand what they are trying to say.
- They may want to do the same work as everyone else, but an adult insists they do something different or special, often outside the classroom.
- Some children may appear to misbehave when they are, in reality, just confused or uncertain about what they are supposed to do.
- They may have failed to understand instructions they have been given.
- They may have forgotten what they have been told.
- They may be confused by different adults giving conflicting messages.
- Children with DS are often subjected to a higher level of structure and supervision than their typically developing peers. As a consequence they may feel the need to exert some control over their lives.
- They may refuse to co-operate with their teacher or assistant as a matter of principle.
- They may be difficult if they feel they are given no opportunities to choose their own activities.
- They may feel under pressure and need a break.
- Finally, they may be imitating immature or badly behaved peers.
- They may spend much of their time in bottom sets or in special needs groups.
- They may have been kept down a year or even more.
- Immature or inappropriate behaviours may have been ignored or accepted in the past.

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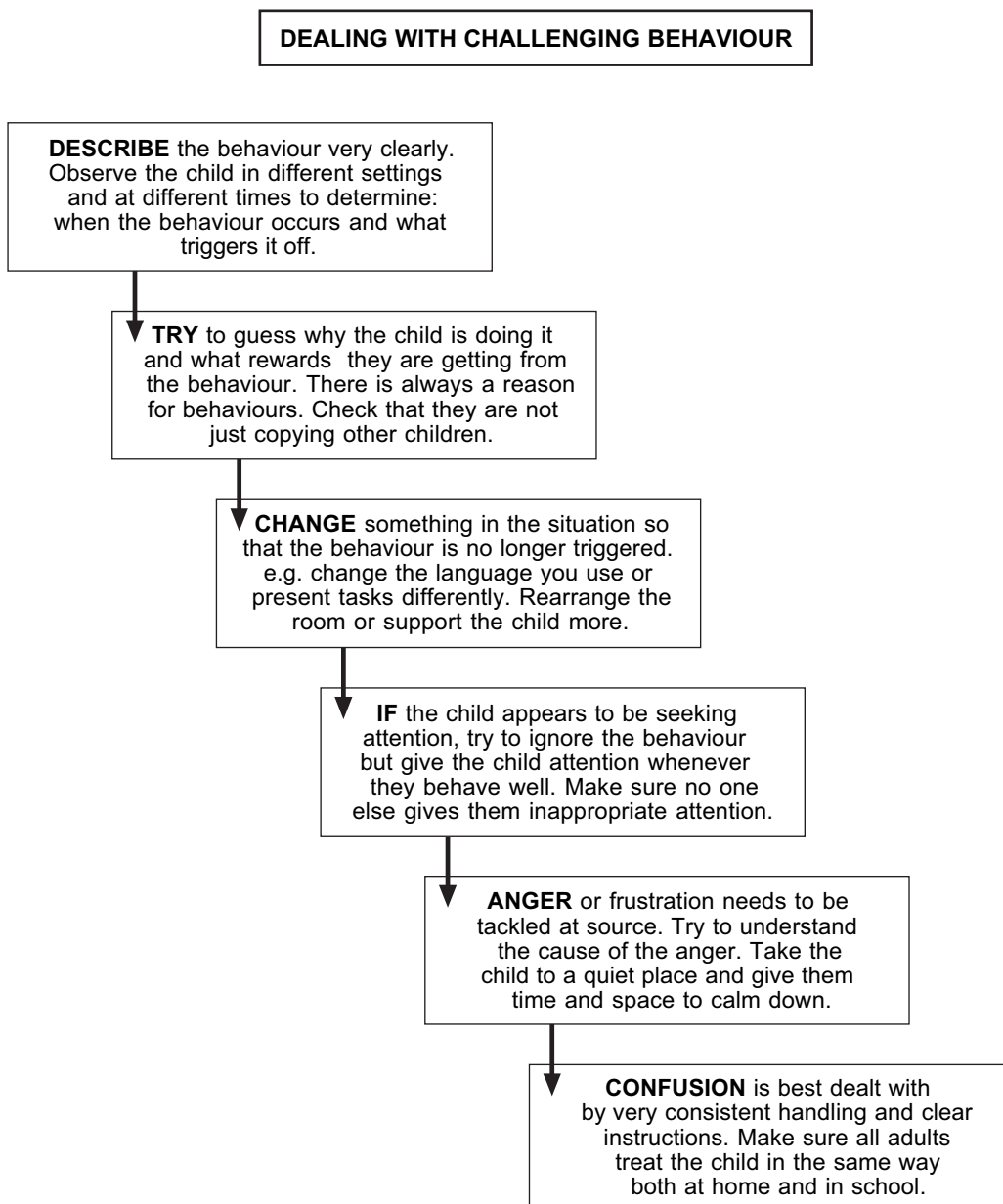
## c) Strategies for dealing with behavioural challenges

Before trying to change a child's behaviour, it is important to observe them in different settings and at different times, to determine when the undesirable behaviour occurs and what triggers it off.

Try to work out why the child is doing it and what rewards they are getting from the behaviour. There is always a reason for behaviours. They may just be copying others, they may find that other children laugh at them; they may get out of activities they dislike. Then, change something in the situation so that the behaviour is no longer triggered, and see whether it makes a difference.

Remember that the best way in the long term to minimise problem behaviour is to replace it by teaching a more desirable alternative.

Never take good behaviour for granted. Always be ready to praise and encourage the child even if they are doing something that is very ordinary.



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### To reduce attention seeking behaviours:

- Give the child attention when they are behaving well. Try to ignore attention-seeking behaviour and encourage peers to do the same.
- Work closely with the parents to ensure that they support the school.
- To reduce frustration: Ensure tasks are appropriately matched to the child's ability.
- Use teaching strategies that build on the child's strengths.

Children should spend by far the majority of time in class (85% or more) with some time in small groups with other members of the class. Keep withdrawal sessions to a minimum while encouraging the child to work co-operatively with peers. Always be clear about why the child is receiving one to one time and make sure that the time is specifically targeting areas that are more difficult to do in class e.g. specific speech and language work.

Take time to listen to what the child is trying to tell you. Use a simple home/school diary to share information with parents or carers.



School contribution

Parental comments

### To avoid confusion:

- Make sure instructions are clear and language is simple enough to ensure understanding.
- Teach the basic rules of behaviour and reinforce them with pictures or lists on the wall. Remind the child of the rules at regular intervals.
- Compare notes with your colleagues and with the child's parents, to ensure you are all giving the same message.

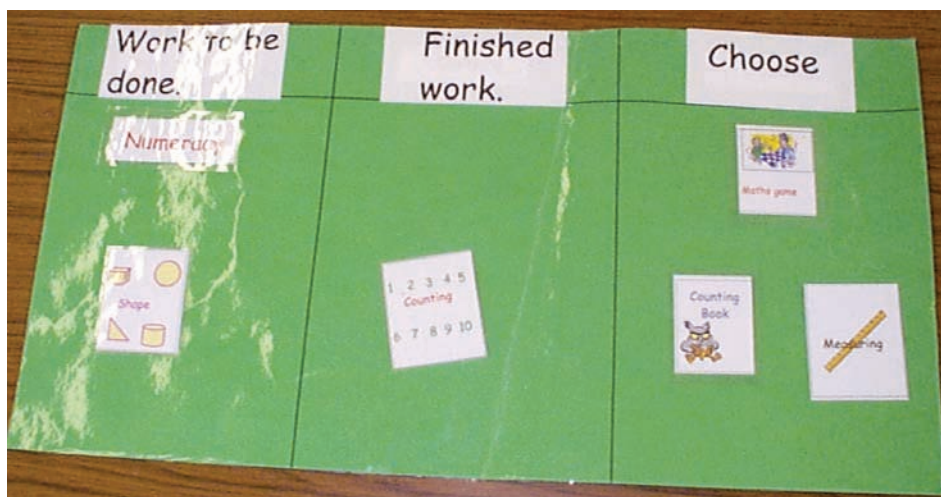
The use of social stories can help to reinforce acceptable behaviours and remind children of what is not acceptable. Opposite is a simple social story for a Reception girl – it is written at a level that she can understand and was very effective:

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### To give the child more control over their life:

- Make sure they have opportunities to choose, refuse an activity or do it later.
- Use workboards as shown below to chunk the amount of work task done balanced with easier 'choosing' work matched to the child's ability to concentrate and work on a task. This needs to be time managed so that the student returns to a work based task after the choice of activity. This can be done by using a sand timer or an oven timer.



- Keep the child in the classroom for special work whenever possible. If withdrawal is really necessary, allow them to bring a friend.
  - Give the child the opportunity to interact with their peers without continual adult supervision.

### To reduce the effects of inappropriate models:

- Keep your expectations as high as possible. Expect the child to behave age-appropriately.
- Try to give them regular opportunities to mix with children displaying age-appropriate behaviours.
- Encourage parents to give them age-appropriate experiences.

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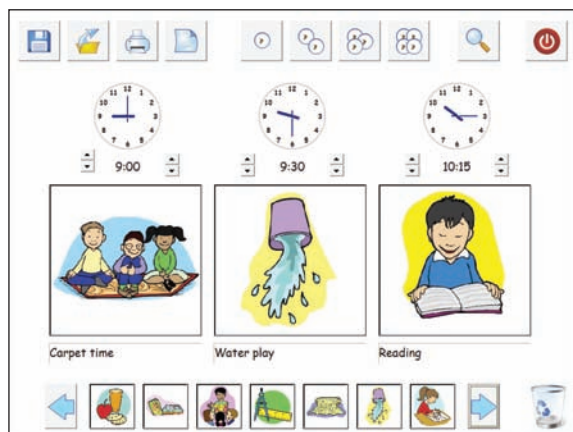
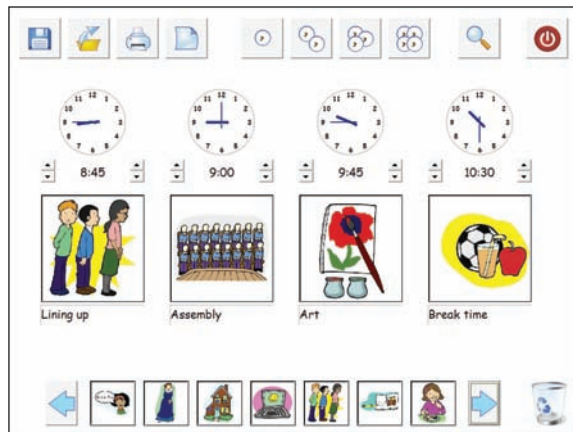
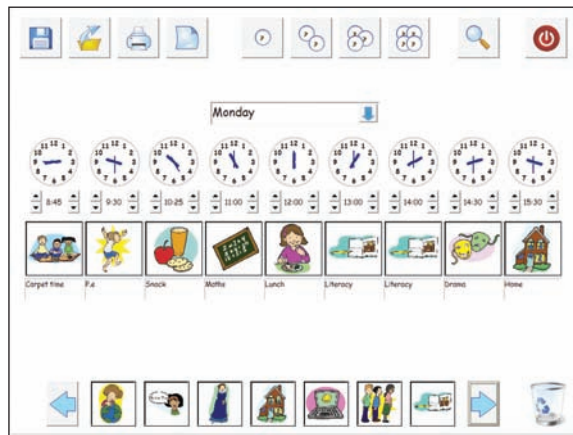
## d) Promoting social inclusion

To promote social inclusion, make sure the child with Down syndrome has learned how to behave appropriately in social situations. They need to understand about rules and routines and be able to co-operate with their peers.

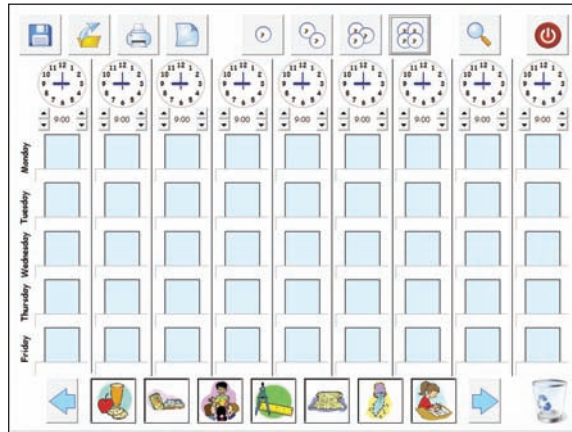
In group work, they must be able to participate and respond appropriately, without dominating or becoming totally passive. They need to learn how to share and take turns. Outside, they need to understand the rules of playground games and what is involved in being a team member.

In the classroom, successful participation is promoted by ensuring that the child:

- Knows the major routines of the day. A visual timetable can help here.



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- Has learned the class rules.
- Can participate appropriately in a small group.
- Will respond to requests and instructions from the class teacher.
- Can tidy their work and line up appropriately.
- Can sit still on the carpet or at a table during class or group sessions.
- Cares for others in the group and is aware of their feelings.

Learning appropriate social and self-help skills is a high priority for most young children with DS. However, many will need extra help and support.

Key skills should be identified and then taught in small steps. Structured approaches, such as backward chaining – where the child is taught initially to do just the last part of the task and then works backwards one step at a time – can be particularly useful.

Picture or photo prompt cards can be helpful, as they show the child what it looks like to complete the task. Similarly, peers can be used as role models to demonstrate successful task completion.

Before starting on a toilet training programme, make sure the child is developmentally ready. Can they retain urine for at least an hour? Do they tell people when they are wet or soiled? If not, they may not be ready.

When teaching dressing skills, make sure they are taught at the appropriate point in the day e.g. coming in from play or changing for PE. Give the child extra time so they don't feel rushed. If they are really slow, use a timer and give smiley faces for finishing before the bell rings.

Encourage lunchtime staff to help the child eat independently but not to cut everything up or feed them unnecessarily. If they take a packed lunch, talk to the parents about making sure that it is easy to unwrap.

Social stories provide a useful strategy to help children with DS understand how their behaviour makes staff and peers feel as well as helping them to describe their own feelings. Below are some examples:

## For a year 5 girl

### ***'When I feel angry'***

*'Sometimes I get angry. When I get angry I hit other children.'*

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*When I hit other children it hurts their bodies and their feelings.  
I am going to try not to hurt my friends.*

*My TA has made me a pink and a purple happy card. When I feel angry I will give my happy card to an adult and the adult will help me.'*

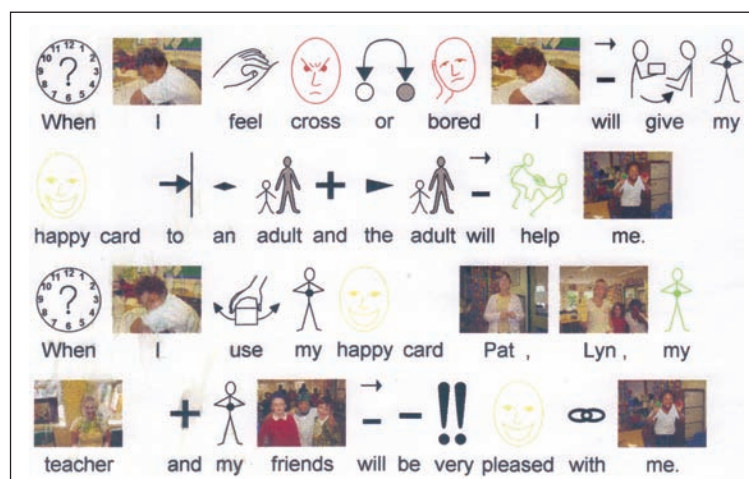
## 'When the bell goes at playtimes'

*'Sometimes I run into school before the bell goes. When I do this I shout at the person who is helping me and I run away from them.*

*When I run into school on my own the adult helping me does not know where I am and they worry because it is not safe for me to do this.*

*I will try to remember to wait until I hear the bell. When I hear the bell I will know that it is OK for me to go into the school.*

*When I remember to wait for the bell, my TAs, my teachers, my mum and the other adults in the school will be very pleased with me and they will see how grown up I am.'*




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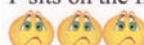
This can also be combined with a social stories book showing both positive and negative images:



When P has worked hard the teacher is very happy. Here P is showing his work to Mrs Allen. Mrs Allen gave P a sticker for good work during a numeracy lesson. P was polite to Mrs Allen.

Miss Wood, Pat, Lyn and Julie are sad if P sits on the floor .



Making key fob books using photos and text are a great way to reinforce positive behaviour – the book below was made for a Reception child who liked to throw sand or water on the floor, spill paint or not get changed for PE. These positive images can be talked through with him to remind him of how well he can do all the positive things:



## e) Case studies

### Jamie

Jamie is a bright little boy in Year 1. He is doing well in school but has started testing the boundaries with his new teacher. After coming in from playtime with no problem last year he has started running off when the bell goes and refusing to come into class. The school has tried chasing him (great fun!), ignoring him and telling him off to no avail. So they have made him line monitor.

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As class line monitor he has a special badge and is expected to stand at the front of the line when the bell goes and lead the class in. To avoid singling him out, all the classes in the school now have a line monitor. But, while in the other classes there is a weekly rota so everyone has a turn, in Jamie's class they have agreed that Jamie will remain line monitor as long as he obeys the rules. If he fails to line up promptly and set a good example, his badge is taken off him and given to someone else for the rest of the week. However, he is made line monitor again the following Monday and given a fresh chance.

So far this term Jamie has only lost his badge once. He was so upset when it was taken off him that his teacher is convinced that the problem has been solved. Jamie is really proud of his badge and shows it to everyone who visits the school. He has even written a story about lining up with photos of him wearing his badge.

### Jack

Jack is at Foundation stage and he made a good start into school. He has limited speech – he can make sounds but his talking is very unclear. However, he understands about 150 Makaton signs and uses them to supplement his speaking and singing. The school staff and pupils have learnt some of the signs so that they can all communicate. Recently there have been some problems with Jack pushing other children. His TA observed him using an ABC (Antecedents, Behaviour, Consequences) chart both during a playtime session and in class – see below.

ABC OBSERVATION OUR LADY'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL, BARNSTAPLE				
CHILD: Child A				
DATE: Wednesday, 11 December 2002				
A ANTECEDENTS (What Provoked the behaviour?)	B BEHAVIOUR (What did the child do?)	C CONSEQUENCE (What happened after?)	Where did it happen?	With who?
Another child on the playground approached child A and stood immediately in front of him (within approx. 30 cm.)	Child A pushed forward with both hand, catching the other child on the chest. Child A laughs when engaged in this behaviour. The other child also laughed and quickly returned for more of the same.	I interceded to prevent the game escalating. I explained to the other child that the behaviour was inappropriate and should not be encouraged. I also told Child A not to push and signed no pushing, in makaton. I then distracted him by introducing a new activity.	On the playground during morning break.	Another infant child from class 1.
Close proximity of another child. Although this is difficult to ascertain as I have not observed any overt behaviour from other children that might prompt the behaviour in Child A.	Child A pushed the child immediately in front of him whilst they were lining up to go into the classroom after playtime.	The other child responded by saying "No, Child A." and making the makaton sign for stop. I reinforced this message both verbally and by signing "No pushing."	On the playground, at the end of morning break as the children assembled in lines to re-enter their classroom.	Classmate waiting in line directly in front of him.

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After discussions with his class teacher and parents, it was agreed that there were probably several reasons for this behaviour:

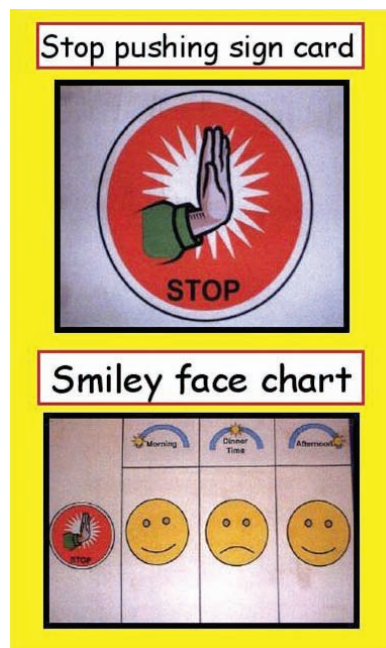
- Poor clarity of speech meant that a push could mean – "Go away, I don't want to play", or "Go away, you're too close to me".
- Other children reacted by laughing at him and thus encouraged him to push more, sometimes pushing back themselves to start a game. The child with DS was learning that 'when I want to play with a child at playtime, all that I need to do is to push someone!'. This then led to an escalation of the inappropriate behaviour.

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ABC OBSERVATION OUR LADY'S RC PRIMARY SCHOOL, BARNSTAPLE				
CHILD: Child A DATE: Wednesday, 11 December 2002				
A ANTECEDENTS (What Provoked the behaviour?)	B BEHAVIOUR (What did the child do?)	C CONSEQUENCE (What happened after?)	Where did it happen?	With who?
No apparent overt actions on the part of any other child. We are considering that Child A maybe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asserting his own personal space, or</li> <li>Ensuring that others notice that he is part of the group.</li> <li>Exhibiting an immature behaviour, more appropriate to his level emotional development.</li> </ul>	Child A Leant over to the left and pushed the child immediately on his left-hand side.	The other child complained to me about being pushed by Child A. I reminded the second child that he could say "No" and use the appropriate makaton sign to reinforce his message. In addition, I also told Child A not to push another child both verbally and with signs.	Group setting where the children assembled in a circle at the beginning of a lesson.	A classmate situated to Child A's left.

### The following strategies were developed:

- The class was reminded that pushing was not an acceptable behaviour from any of them.
- If Jack A pushed any of them, the child was asked to say and sign 'No pushing it hurts me and makes me feel sad' and then turn and move away.
- Staff would also intervene where necessary and remind Jack to Stop! No pushing – see sign card below.
- Just as importantly, a simple reward chart with smiley and sad faces was made for Jack – see chart below.



This was targeted at break time and lunchtime. A smiley face would be given if no pushing occurred at a break time, and a sad face if pushing had occurred. 3 smiley faces, cumulative, resulted in a special choosing activity of Child A's choice.

Within a few weeks the pushing behaviour had stopped completely.

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It is helpful to include IEP targets around independence, friendships and behaviour and a useful way of recording this for staff to use is with a social inclusion chart:

Social Inclusion			
Pupil's Name		Start Date	
Year Group		Review Date	
	Current Ability	Target	Action/Strategy
<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>	Previously independent Oliver no longer wants to go to lunch by himself, but wants TA to go with him.	To return to independent behaviour.	Remind him to find someone to go with him 10 minutes before lunch and encourage peers to include Oliver in their group.
<b>BEHAVIOUR</b>	Reluctant to sit down in his place at beginning of lesson.	To sit in his place ready to start lesson most of the time.	Use target sheet – happy face for each time he is ready to start lesson – teacher directed.
<b>FRIENDSHIPS</b> absence.	Oliver tends to spend break time with a girl who can become dependent on him, or with a low ability boy with whom play lapses into name calling or worse.	To encourage play with a wider group of pupils.	Talk to other children in class in Oliver's  Arrange ball games or activities e.g. cleaning out gerbils with rota of children to help friendships to develop.

### f) Useful reading

Alton, S. (2001) **Behaviour in Children with Down's syndrome – Information Sheet.** Down's Syndrome Association.

Buckley, S., Bird, G. & Sacks, B. (2002) **Social Development for Individuals with Down syndrome. Down syndrome Issues & Information.** Down Syndrome Educational Trust.

Dodd, S. (1994) **Managing Problem Behaviours: A Practical Guide for Parents and Teachers of Young Children with Special Needs.** MacLennan & Petty.

Emerson, E. (2002) **Challenging Behaviour: Analysis and Intervention in People with Severe Intellectual Disabilities.** Cambridge University Press.

Flynn, M. & Flynn, P. (1998) **Thinking about having a Learning Disability.** Belitha Press.

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