

ABILITY AWARENESS:

Sample lesson plan

Objectives:

- To help children understand about Down syndrome.
- To help children realize that children with Down syndrome (or any disability) are more like them than unlike them.
- To discuss how they might be supportive to a schoolmate or classmate with Down syndrome.

Materials:

- Book or video about Down syndrome.
 - Note: I tend to read a book that I co-wrote with my son who has Down syndrome. Without access to that book, I recommend using one of the books (or video) listed on the resource page. Review the book before reading it to the class and make any necessary modifications/omissions.

Prep prior to the lesson:

If there is a student with Down syndrome in the class in which you are presenting, the following should occur before the lesson:

- Discuss with the parents that you'd like to present a lesson about Down syndrome to the class. Ask permission to identify their child as having Down syndrome. Explain why this is beneficial - it's not something to hide, but rather celebrate.
- Ask and encourage the student's parents to be present and/or participate in the lesson.
- Inform the parents that the plan is to have "focus student" out of the classroom as it allows children to feel safe asking questions and the focus student to not feel uncomfortable.
- Ask if the parent can bring in (and/or present) a few photographs of their child. I recommend that most of the photos show typical things (e.g. being a sibling, playing music, etc.), and one or two that make them special (e.g. meeting Micky Mouse, riding a horse, etc.). The photographs are to personalize the lesson - it's about a child, not just a diagnosis.
- Depending on the age and prior discussions in the class, consider doing a lesson a few days prior on disabilities in general and/or gifts and challenges of the students.
- Consider whether you want to include an optional lesson/s on low muscle tone (attached) after reading the book.

Day of the lesson:

Agenda:

Discuss the following plan and reasoning (b/c there is a student with Ds in their class or because it's World Down Syndrome Day, etc.) with the students:

- Read a book or show a video about Down syndrome.
- If the focus student isn't present acknowledge that "x" isn't in class right now but knows that the book is being read.
- Lead a question and answer session.
- Optional: "focus student's" parent/s show photographs of their child.
- Optional: lead one of the low muscle tone simulation activities.

Notes for Book/Video and Discussion:

- Choose the best book for your audience and change some of the wording if necessary. (i.e. I usually change “I’m in a special education class...” to “I’m in a regular education class...” in the book “Taking Down Syndrome to School.”)
- Decide if it’s appropriate to mention the terms retard/retarded. I tend to skip this for tk/k classes, but bring it up for first and older and expand upon the reasoning for older students (4th grade and above).
- Ask students questions i.e. “How can you be helpful classmates?”
- Caution students against doing things for their classmate rather than showing - helping isn’t always helpful.
- Incorporate discussion about low muscle tone.
- Discuss the fact that even though a student might not speak, they can understand a lot.
- Discuss various forms of communication, e.g. sign/gestures, pictures, expressions, etc.

Optional Activity re: low muscle tone (lessons attached)**Conclusion:**

- Bring the group back to a closing discussion.
- Try to sum it up by pointing out the objectives.



Sock Activity – simulates low muscle tone in hands

Objectives:

- To have students understand what low muscle tone means and how it might feel.
- To have students have a concrete experience to illustrate the challenges of having low muscle tone in one's hands/fingers.
- To allow students to be more empathetic to students who might have have low muscle tone.
- To understand how hard students with low muscle tone must work to do a task that most students do not have to work as hard on.

Materials:

- clean socks (I collect strays from the laundry)
 - If doing the name-writing - one sock for each student
 - If doing the shoe-tying, enough for each student to have two socks.
- paper and pencils (if doing the name writing version)

Introduction:

- Read a book, watch a video and/or have a discussion about Down syndrome.
- Discuss that people with Down syndrome have low muscle tone.
 - Low muscle tone is essentially when one's muscles and ligaments are too loose and flexible, it's not the same as being weak.
 - It takes more coordination and strength for someone with Down syndrome to do the same physical task as it would someone who had typical muscle tone.
 - Low muscle tone affects all of the muscles and muscles are everywhere: mouth, legs, waist, hands, etc..
- They will do an activity that allows them to get a sense of what it might be like to have low muscle tone in their hands.

Activity:

- Have the students put a sock on their *non-dominant* hand and write their name.
- OR
- Have students put a sock on each hand and tie their shoes (or their neighbor's shoes if they don't have laces).

Conclusion:

- Ask if it was more difficult to write their name/tie shoes.
- Many (especially younger kids) will likely say "no" - ask if it took more time and focus....which it likely did.
- Point out that this level of focus and control is what someone with low muscle tone has to do for every task that involves their hands....writing, tying, buttoning, drawing, etc...
- Patience and practice is what allows people with low tone to be successful with such tasks.



Marshmallow Activity - simulates low muscle tone in mouth

Objectives:

- To have students understand what low muscle tone means and how it might feel.
- To have students have a concrete experience to illustrate the challenges of having low muscle tone in one's mouth.
- To allow students to be more empathetic to students who might have have low muscle tone.
- To better understand why people with Down syndrome have challenges with speech.
- To get a better sense of how one can work to be a better listener.

Materials:

Enough large marshmallows for each student to have one.

Introduction:

- Read a book, watch a video and/or have a discussion about Down syndrome.
- Discuss that people with Down syndrome have low muscle tone.
 - Low muscle tone is essentially when one's muscles and ligaments are too loose and flexible, it's not the same as being weak.
 - It takes more coordination and strength for someone with Down syndrome to do the same physical task as it would someone who had typical muscle tone.
 - Low muscle tone affects all of the muscles and muscles are everywhere: mouth, legs, waist, hands, etc..
- They will do an activity that allows them to get a sense of what it might be like to have low muscle tone in their mouth.

Activity:

State and model the activity for the children (before passing out marshmallows)

- You will get into pairs.
- One at a time one of the pair will put their marshmallow in their mouth and without chewing/ swallowing will state a sentence. *[Note: For younger students I might give a context question for them to work with, e.g. "tell your partner what you ate for breakfast today."*
- Their partner then has to listen carefully and repeat back what he/she heard.
- Repeat activity so that the other student can be the speaker.
- Ask the students *why* they think you're doing this activity.

Conclusion:

- Ask if it was more difficult and took more concentration to speak and/or to listen.
- Point out that this level of focus and control is what someone with low muscle tone has to do when they speak (and they don't get a marshmallow at the end!)
- Also point out that with more patience and focused listening, one can understand more.

