

A Families' Guide to Best of All Adults

**best of all (noun) \best of all\
is continual, measurable, celebrated and it never ends.**

It is a daily challenge to do a little better than you did the day before and it's always celebrated.

Possible manifestations: standing just one second longer, reading just one more word, learning just one new number, taking just one more step, never a competition, never completed.



Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.



You can keep your child engaged in meaningful experiences as an adult! And we'll help!

Our goal at GiGi's Playhouse is to celebrate every display of a learner's best of all! We do this through purposeful programs at our Playhouses that start at the prenatal stage and grow into adulthood. We build specific skills & focus on areas of development. For our adult learners, we specifically focus on social interactions and social skills, as well as gross motor skills and language development.

GiGi's Playhouse is a place to develop independence and push boundaries. We understand that it may be challenging to keep your child active and engaged – but it is so important to keep him or her happy, healthy and confident!

This book is a tool for you! Our program leaders build social-based activities for your adult to participate in while at the Playhouse and to continue building these skills at home. We've provided many of our favorite activities in this book. Each activity is FUN, but very purposeful and learning based.

With your dedication and GiGi's Playhouse programs, your child will

- Increase social skills, focusing on group participation and increasing leisure activity options;
- Increase speech and language development, focusing on appropriateness, maintaining conversation and non-verbal social language;
- Prepare for career and volunteer opportunities, focusing on professionalism, customer service skills and confidence;
- Increase health and wellness, focusing on general health, strength, and awareness of personal space; and

Achieve his or her Best of All!



Social Skills



Speech &
Language
Development



Career
Development



Health/
Wellness



Academic
Support

Build Best of All during programs at GiGi's Playhouse

It is important to foster independence and confidence in your child. Set high expectations every day – encourage the completion of daily tasks, meaningful interactions and participation in activities. The skills and knowledge that adults have may be lost if they aren't engaged in regular practice; in other words, if they don't use it, they'll lose it!

While your child participates in programs at GiGi's Playhouse independently, you continue to play a role in his or her development. Here's what you can do, as related to our programs –

- Encourage your child to attend our programs regularly.
- Be timely and accountable. Ensure your child arrives to programs on time, participates regularly and completes all take home activities or homework.
- GiGi's Playhouse encourages all adults to work out regularly and eat healthy – hold your child accountable to this while at home!
- Communicate with the staff and program leaders regularly. Together we are on the same team and all want your child to reach his or her greatest potential!
- Follow the rest of the tips within this book to practice and build skills at home!

Tips & Tools for Best of All at Home

We've provided a number of activities to do at home that are easy, take little time and are purposeful. Help your child build these activities into his or her everyday life and hold him or her accountable! The growth that you'll see will be amazing!

Build Social Skills

Social skills develop throughout one's life. This is what allows us to interact with others, form relationships and develop independence.

During adulthood, many individuals with Down syndrome are working towards developing more mature communication and social skills throughout their daily environments. It is important to continue stimulating adults in social interactions, both to increase their independence and to practice and strengthen language skills.

Tips and activities to build social skill development:

- Ensure that your child has the opportunity for meaningful conversations daily. This could include shopping trips to the grocery store, dinner with friends, talking about current events or sending notes via email.
- Set a goal with your child each week. Keep track of your child's success during the week and celebrate together. As he or she achieves the goal, make it a bit more challenging the following week. Goals could include;
 - Conversations with friends or family via the phone or Skype
 - Greet friends with a hand shake and eye contact
 - Speak in complete sentences when addressing someone
 - Maintain eye contact during a conversation
 - Plan and serve dinner one night during the week
 - Read an article or watch a newscast – hold conversations regarding these current events
 - Get involved in neighborhood activities and attend regularly
 - Volunteer at a local soup kitchen, business or special event
 - Plan a family fun night – gather supplies, plan menu and shop
 - Create something of interest – a craft project, model of a car, take pictures, or more
 - Write a resume together and deliver it to potential employers
 - Practice interviewing together
 - Practice reading, writing and math regularly each week. Read recipes, count change and write grocery lists.

- Encourage your child to participate in group outings and events. By being in a social environment, your child will then be provided with many opportunities to engage with others. Get involved at a local animal shelter, recreational organizations, church groups or even health club.
- Role-play with your child before a big event. Practice greeting someone properly, maintaining conversation and responding to questions. This practice will greatly increase your child's confidence!
- If your child has difficulty navigating a conversation or understanding a situation, use social stories to provide clarity. Highlight social cues, events, feelings and reactions by revisiting the situation and actions. Use visual cues or role-playing to support understanding.
- It is often necessary for a family member or friend to be the facilitator during a group interaction. Draw each participant into the planning discussions, asking for their input or ideas and offering choices whenever possible.

Awareness of personal space is an important construct to facilitate appropriate social interactions. From a physical standpoint, developing an awareness of where an individual places his/her body and how to move through a variety of environments are skills to learn in this area.

Tips and activities to build awareness of personal space:

- When having conversations with the adult, model an appropriate distance for speaking.
- Teach your child to say "excuse me" or use a gesture when passing through a crowded area. After indicating their desire to pass, instruct your child to wait until space has been made before moving through the space. Practice this consistently.
- Discuss who and when it is appropriate to hug others, including family members, friends, and acquaintances.

Build Language Development

Language increases your child's ability to interact with the environment and lead a fulfilling life. Addressing your child's language and communication skills at home is an important step toward independence and successfully interacting with others.

During adulthood, many individuals with Down syndrome are working towards understanding more abstract language, such as humor. They continue to work on generalization and maintenance of skills across different social settings. This can be difficult for some adults with Down syndrome, so feedback from family members and friends is very important for their language and communication development to continue to mature.

Tips and activities to build language development:

- Provide regular feedback on communication. Slowly model what your child should be saying or signing. Repetition, practice and support will help your child gain skills.
- Talk about appropriateness in conversations. Talk to your child about feelings and empathy, by asking questions, such as "How do you think that made him feel?" or "When you walk away while he is talking to you, he thinks you do not want to talk to him". This feedback is critical in improving both language and social skills.
- Provide a slightly higher level of language within your home. This will, in time, promote improved language skills.
- Practice conversation maintenance by taking turns. Ask a basic question and wait for a response. Use facial expressions to signal, "Ok, your turn". If the child does not continue the conversation verbally, prompt him by saying, "Your turn to talk". If your child goes off topic, bring him or her back to the conversation immediately. Slowly increase the number of turns. Remember that daily practice, praise and patience is needed to develop this skills.
- Recognize your child's signs of non-verbal communication through his or her body language and facial expressions. Attach words to nonverbal communication, as this communicates that their message has been heard. Simple words are best like, "that was fun!" in response to your child's facial expression or gesture. Continue to work toward building a larger gestural vocabulary. Many adults with Down syndrome have difficulty reading non-verbal communication correctly. Be patient with this, as progress may be slow.

Build Gross Motor Skills

During adulthood, many individuals with Down syndrome are working towards refining balance and using independent mobility for participation in the workplace, community, and leisure activities.

General health & fitness: An active lifestyle should be encouraged to maintain strength and balance and for overall health. There are both physical and emotional benefits of physical activity and exercise including cardiovascular fitness, maintaining a healthy body weight, and emotional well-being. A healthy body leads to a healthy mind!

Tips and activities to encourage health & fitness:

- For overall health, the American Heart Association recommends 30 minutes of physical activity or exercise five times a week. Check with a doctor before beginning an exercise program. Initially, your teen/adult may not be able to participate in 30 minutes of continuous exercise. That's OK! Begin to work toward that goal. If they can complete 10 minutes, begin at that level. Every week, aim to increase the exercise time by 3-5 minutes. You can also break up exercise bouts. For example, take a 10 minute walk after breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Three short walks, and you've met the goal!
- Find active leisure activities that are enjoyable for each individual. Dancing, swimming, walking, bike riding, dance/exercise DVDs or video games, etc. Some people enjoy exercising at home, while others like getting outside or to a gym.
- Participate in active leisure activities with friends and family: a nature walk at the local forest preserve, playing basketball in the driveway, line dancing, swimming at the community pool or beach. Everyone is more likely to participate in active leisure activities when they are having fun and spending time with important people in their life
- Discover what motivates each individual and use goals to see the progress: A step counter/fitness tracker, an app with colorful charts, a goal sheet with a reward, the time spent with a family member/friend when exercising together are all examples of motivators. Use what works best for your teen/adult, but avoid food as a reward.
- Some adults with Down syndrome have difficulty with balance. Activities that can help improve balance include tai chi, yoga, and dancing.

Glossary

- Co-contraction:** the action of completely stiffening one part of the body by contracting muscles on both sides of a joint
- Dexterity:** accurate and efficient hand movements for function
- Digital palmer grasp:** a grasp used to hold a pencil or tool, in which the handle is stabilized in the palm, while the thumb, second and third fingers extend to the end; the second stage of grasp development
- Expressive language:** the ability to put thoughts into words and sentences in a way that makes sense and is grammatically accurate
- Fine motor skills:** the small movements of the body that use the small muscles of the fingers, toes, wrists, lips and tongue
- Gross motor skills:** the large movements of the body including rolling, sitting, crawling, standing, walking, running, and jumping
- Hyperextension:** “locking” a joint by over-extending it, using the skeletal stability rather than muscle control
- Hypotonia:** the condition in which muscles don’t have the normal amount of tone, or contraction, so they appear loose or floppy
- Ligamentous laxity:** Ligaments are connective tissue that help support our joints. Ligamentous laxity, which is common in people with low muscle tone, results in increased mobility and possibly decreased stability around the joints
- Muscle power:** the ability to contract a muscle for a quick or explosive movement
- Muscle strength:** the ability to contract a muscle and generate force
- Palmer grasp:** a grasp in which the utensil or pencil is held firmly in the palm by all the fingers and thumb; the first stage of grasp development.
- Pincer grasp:** the thumb and first finger come together to pick up small objects
- Physical activity:** Any activity that gets your body moving and burns calories.

Pronation: When related to fine motor skills, it is the normal resting position of the forearms and hands (palms down). When related to gross motor skills, it is when the foot and/or ankle roll inwards, placing weight on the inside of the foot.

Prone: laying on one's stomach

Quadruped: positioned on one's hands and knees

Rating of perceived exertion: way of measuring physical activity intensity level. Perceived exertion is how hard you feel like your body is working. Even though each person rates their own work level, it is found to be a good estimate of heart rate during exercise.

Receptive language: what we understand and comprehend, such as following directions and understanding a story that was read

Sensory integration: the neurological process that organizes and integrates sensations from the body and the environment in order to make an adaptive response

Speech: the verbal ability to make the sounds that become words, the physical act of talking. Speech consists of articulation (how speech sounds are made), voice (the use of the vocal folds and breathing to support speech) and fluency (the rhythm of speech)

Supination: When related to fine motor skills, it is the rotating of the wrist to turn the forearm and the palm up. When related to gross motor skills, it is the rolling outward of the foot and ankle.

Supine: laying on one's back

Visual motor: refers to activities in which the eyes guide hand movements

Wide base of support: positioning the body part, typically the arms or legs, spread wide apart.

Resource List

Suggested Books:

Boyfriends and Girlfriends: A Guide to Dating for People with Disabilities by Terri Couwenhoven

Down Syndrome Parenting 101: Must-Have Advice for Making Your Life Easier by Natalie Hale

Mental Wellness in Adults with Down Syndrome: A Guide to Emotional and Behavioral Strengths and Challenges by [Dennis McGuire](#) & [Brian Chicoine](#)

Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond by Jed Baker

Teaching Children with Down Syndrome about Their Bodies, Boundaries and Sexuality-A Guide for Parents and Professionals by Terri Couwenhoven

[The Guide to Good Health for Teens & Adults with Down Syndrome](#) by [Brian Chicoine](#) & Dennis McGuire

The New Social Story Book, Revised and Expanded 10th Anniversary Edition: Over 150 Social Stories that Teach Everyday Social Skills to Children with Autism or Asperger's Syndrome and their Peers by Carol Gray

Who's the Slow Learner? A Chronicle of Inclusion and Exclusion by Sandra Assiomotos McElwee

Suggested Websites:

American Heart Association: <http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>

Offers a variety of tools to live a healthy lifestyle, including nutrition and physical fitness activities.

Do2Learn: www.do2learn.com

Offers a variety of free social skill activities and tools.

Friendship Circle: <http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/>

Blog for parents of children with special needs.

Parenting Science: <http://www.parentingscience.com/>

Parenting tips and tools driven by science and research. Great tips on social skills.

Play Therapy Supply: <https://www.playtherapysupply.com/games>

This website has an array of games and activities to teach and expand social skills. Search "adult".

Playing with Words 365: www.playingwithwords365.com

Blog by a speech language pathologist with to promote language development.

Woodbine House: <http://www.woodbinehouse.com/Down-Syndrome.29.0.0.2.htm>

A continued list of books and resources about Down syndrome.

Suggested Phone Apps:

GoalTracker App: Available on Android and Apple phones

Tracking tool for personal fitness, health, budget, career goals and more.

HabitBull App: Available on Android phones

Tracking tool for habits and routines.

Pedometer App- Available on Android and Apple phones

Tracks the number of steps and aligns them to calories burned, distance, time walked and more.

Workout Trainer App: Available on Android and Apple phones

Variety of exercises, full workouts and physical fitness tips.

Suggested DVD:

Shaun T's Fit Kids Club DVD Workout by Beachbody

Work out/Dance video

Gift List for Adults

- Scrabble & Scrabble, Jr.
- Apples to Apples
- Yahtzee
- Jenga
- Jigsaw puzzles
- Address books
- Cookbooks
- Good quality shoes for taking walks and hiking
- Gift certificates for bowling, community plays and other outings
- Wii game systems, especially games that promote movement and turn taking.
- Pedometer or fitness tracker
- Dance, Yoga or Workout DVDs
- Bike
- MP3 or music speakers
- Karaoke machine

About the Authors

GiGi's Playhouse thanks our amazing team of therapeutic experts!

Lyndsey Menning is a physical therapist working in the Northwest Suburbs of Chicago. She completed her undergraduate degree in kinesiology and exercise physiology at the University of Wisconsin and her Masters degree in physical therapy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She has spent the last 13 years working in Early Intervention and private practice. She specializes in treating the birth to age eight population, serving children with a wide range of developmental delays and disabilities, including many children with Down syndrome. She enjoys bringing her clinical expertise into the home setting to make it accessible and practical for families in the early years of their child's development.

Chris Newlon has served on the Board of Managers for GiGi's Playhouse McHenry County for the past 6 years in a variety of roles. She is also a public speaker and outreach specialist for the National Association for Down Syndrome, with a focus in schools and hospitals. Chris worked in Adolescent Psychiatry and with people with Eating Disorders as a licensed OT in Ohio and Illinois. She is the mother of five children, ages 12 to 28, the youngest of whom has Down Syndrome.

Lora White is a pediatric speech and language pathologist in private practice in the Northwest Suburbs of Illinois. She has spent the last 35 years working with children with developmental disabilities and their families. Lora has extensive training in oral motor/ feeding issues and the communication development of children. Her practice consists of many children with Down syndrome.

Kenzi Huelskoetter has her Type 03 Teaching License and has spent all of her career in educational and recreational program management.

Daniell Bargstadt is the National Programs Manager at GiGi's Playhouse. She conducts research and development to grow our programs, enhances program materials, and provides training, support and guidance to program staff and volunteers. Daniell has been with GiGi's for over 12 years, as a founder, a board President, a local program coordinator, and now a member of the national staff. On the personal side, she's the mother of 5 children, the youngest of which is Olivia, a teenager with Down syndrome shown at left. You can reach Daniell at dbargstadt@gigisplayhouse.org, or by submitting a Zen Desk ticket in the category of Programs. Daniell is honored to have worked so closely with our team of experts to complete this project!

Bibliography

Bruni, Maryanne. *Fine Motor Skills for Children with Down Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. Second Edition. Woodbine House, 2006.

Chicoine, Brian and McGuire, Dennis. *The Guide to Good Health for Teens and Adults with Down Syndrome*. Woodbine House, 2010.

Couwenhoven, Terri. *Boyfriends and Girlfriends: A Guide for Dating for People with Disabilities*. Woodbine House, 2015.

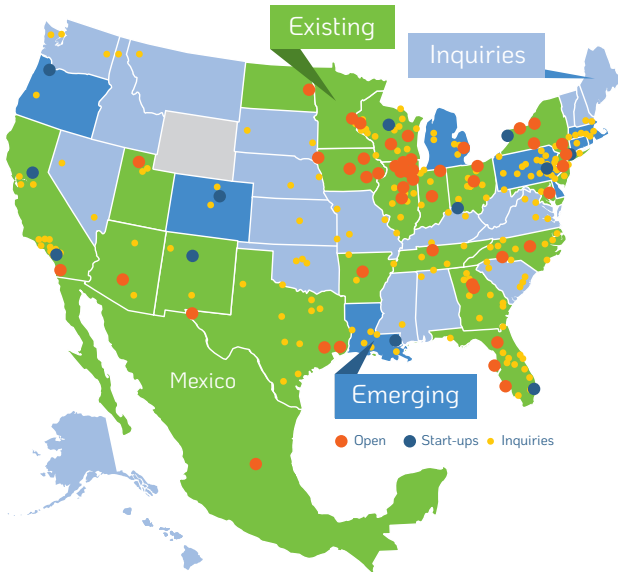
Hale, Natalie. *Down Syndrome Parenting 101: Must-Have Advice for Making Your Life Easier*. Woodbine House, 2011.

McElwee, Sandra Assimotos. *Who's the Slow Learner? A Chronicle of Inclusion and Excellence*. Woodbine House, 2014.

Payne, V. Gregory, and Larry D. Isaacs. *Human Motor Development: A Lifespan Approach*. Vol. 4. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2008. Print.

American Heart Association: <http://www.heart.org/HEARTORG/>

Disclaimer: Please note that the activities and exercises within this book should not replace therapeutic intervention. It is best to consult your therapist or speech and language pathologist who is trained to individualize to the needs of your child. Their guidance will be important for successful development.



Down Syndrome Achievement Centers
educate. inspire. believe.

Locations across North America, including Mexico, and still growing!
Check our website for a location near you!
gigisplayhouse.org

