

The more we discover about Down syndrome, the more we also learn about the impact of children and youth with Down syndrome upon their families. Recent studies have increasingly found more positive effects than had been reported in the past. For example, in an 11 year study of *all* children born in one midsize state, researchers found that over the course of that study, parents of children with Down syndrome actually had a *lower* divorce rate than did parents of children *without* disabilities (Urbano & Hodapp, 2007).

In a study of brothers and sisters of children with Down syndrome, other researchers found *more positive* interactions and *less unkindness* in sibling relationships when one sibling had Down syndrome than in families in which *neither* child had a disability (Cuskelly & Gunn, 2003). While studies have noted that parents of children with Down syndrome *do* experience more stress in parenting their child, one recent study found that families of children with developmental delays (including Down syndrome) rated their child's *positive impact* just as highly as did families whose children did not have a developmental delay (Blacher & Baker, 2007).

## Expectations

Parents may wonder how much "special" treatment a child with Down syndrome will need. Research and parents' own experience tell us that children with Down syndrome are more like other children than they are different. It is, of course, important for parents to set well-defined expectations and a clear structure for family routines, to provide ample opportunities for their child to learn new skills, and to use plenty of positive reinforcement.

If there are siblings, they can be particularly helpful in stimulating the child's interests, discovering what is rewarding for the child, and in setting boundaries where appropriate (such as limiting play with their toys, etc.).

## Relationships

When a child with a disability is born, parents may not take the time to recognize *each other's* emotional needs. They may feel resentful, misplacing blame on their partner or ignoring what their partner is feeling. They may also feel hurt or angry if they have to carry a larger share of the duties, for whatever reasons, including medical appointments.

Encourage parents to strengthen their relationships through listening, communication, and time together alone. Extended family members often can help provide time for "togetherness" for parents.