



Down Syndrome  
Australia

# A guide for employers

Practical strategies for  
training and support



This document has been produced by  
Down Syndrome Australia.

Down Syndrome Australia is the peak body for people with Down syndrome in Australia. Our purpose is to influence social and policy change, and provide a national profile and voice for people living with Down syndrome.

We work collaboratively with the state and territory Down syndrome associations to achieve our mission.

Our vision is an Australia where people living with Down syndrome are valued, reach their potential, and enjoy social and economic inclusion.

### **Acknowledgements**

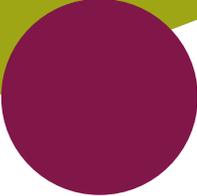
Thank you to all of the people working and volunteering at the state and territory associations who have contributed to the development of this booklet. The content of this booklet has been put together from the resources that the state and territory associations have developed over many years.

Editing, design and layout by Black Widow Design.

# Contents

<b>Down syndrome and employment - a practical guide</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Employees with Down syndrome .....	4
Get to know your employee .....	5
<b>Practical strategies to support learning in the workplace</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Task analysis .....	8
Chaining .....	9
Using prompts .....	9
Using visual supports .....	11
Planning for the working day .....	12
Instructions and procedures .....	18
Task support .....	19
Signs .....	20
Other tips for supporting your employee with Down syndrome .....	20





# Down syndrome and employment – a practical guide

**This is a companion resource to *A Guide for Employers*, which contains information for employers who are thinking about employing someone with Down syndrome.**

This practical guide contains support and training ideas and advice for employers of staff with Down syndrome.

## **Employees with Down syndrome**

People with Down syndrome want to work for the same reasons as everyone else – so that they can be independent, have good self-esteem and take pride in their work, contribute to society, earn their own money, learn new skills, meet new people and feel valued. It is a vital part of having a good life.

Everyone with Down syndrome has the ability to work in some capacity. The aim should be to find a role that suits each individual, so they can do the job successfully. When given the opportunity, people with Down syndrome can achieve great things and bring much to their workplace.

While people with Down syndrome have an intellectual disability, each person is an individual and brings their own strengths, skills and qualities to their job. Some people may need ongoing support while others may be relatively self-sufficient.

This resource will help you to provide the right level of support for your employee with Down syndrome.

## Get to know your employee

Everyone is different, so an important first step to success is to spend some time with, and get to know, your employee. You want to know what interests and motivates them, and what helps them to learn new skills. This will help you know what to include in their training and support plan, so make notes as you go.

Examples of information you should gather:

- What is the person's skill level, knowledge and understanding of the duties of the role?
- What are the person's strengths?
- Where might they may need extra help?
- What is the best way for the person to learn new information?
- How does the person communicate?
- How well does the person understand what is being said to them?
- How well does the person communicate with others?
- Does the person have skills or prior experiences that will help them in their current role?

The information you have gathered will help you to tailor the employee's training and workplace support. This will enhance their learning and help them be successful in their role.



# Practical strategies to support learning in the workplace

This section contains examples of practical strategies that have been developed to support people with Down syndrome. Some employees may have difficulty with attention, memory and information processing. However, simple strategies and visual aids will help with carrying out their roles.

Remember that each person is different, and each job is different. Use the strategies that work for your employee, adapting them to suit.

Here are some general tips to support learning. These are useful for initial training and for ongoing workplace support. There is more detail on using these in practice as we go through this resource.



## Practical strategies to support learning in the workplace

Attention	Memory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Break the task down into smaller steps.</li><li>✓ Minimise any distractions.</li><li>✓ Give regular and specific feedback on their performance.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Give the person enough time to learn the new information and skills.</li><li>✓ Regularly give the person opportunities to practise the new skills.</li><li>✓ Use visual aids/supports.</li></ul>
Information processing	Motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Give short and clear instructions.</li><li>✓ Give the person enough time to process the instructions.</li><li>✓ Use visual aids/supports.</li><li>✓ Use direct instructions, e.g. modelling and prompts.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Provide information and instructions in a way that the person understands. Use Easy Read where appropriate.</li><li>✓ Provide immediate feedback and positive reinforcements.</li><li>✓ Teach the skills in a way that fit the individual's learning style.</li><li>✓ Motivate by interest – give the person opportunities to continually learn new skills.</li></ul>

## Task analysis

An important part of teaching anyone how to do a task is to break the task into steps. This is called task analysis.

This allows the person to learn the task in a logical sequence, and helps you to identify which steps the person may be having difficulty with. Make sure there are no more than 10 steps and tailor the task analysis to the individual.

You could use task analysis together with the forward or backward chaining techniques (explained in the next section) to help with teaching the task.

Here are some examples of using task analysis in visual aids to help a person see and learn the steps involved in a task.

### Putting staples into a stapler

-  Pull open the top of the stapler
-  Put the staples into the stapler tray
-  Close the top of the stapler
-  Staple the pages together

### Washing hands

	Turn tap on
	Wet hands
	Rub hands with soap
	Rub hands with water
	Turn tap off
	Dry hands

## Chaining

Chaining is a method you can use to teach a more complex task, beginning by breaking it down into smaller steps.

Forward chaining is when we learn a new task from the beginning to the end. The person will be learning the new steps as they work through the task analysis from the first step to the last step.

Backward chaining is a great way to withdraw support over time. The person completes the last step of the task independently the first time, then the last two the next time and so on. By working backwards, we make sure the person always experiences the success of completing the task. This helps with motivation and builds their confidence in their ability to do the task independently. You can use this chart to keep track of progress using both forward and backward chaining.

### Forward chaining – Learning steps of a task from the first step to the last step

Steps	1	2	3	4	5	6
Baseline	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

### Backward chaining – Learning steps of a task from the last step to the first step

Steps	1	2	3	4	5	6
Baseline	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓

## Using prompts

You can use different kinds of prompts to help people learn a task. They include:

- Modelling - show the person how to do a task.
- Physical prompts - such as hand on hand guidance to do a task. It is important to seek consent first.
- Verbal prompts – explain or remind what comes next.
- Gestures – give an instruction or reminder without speech.

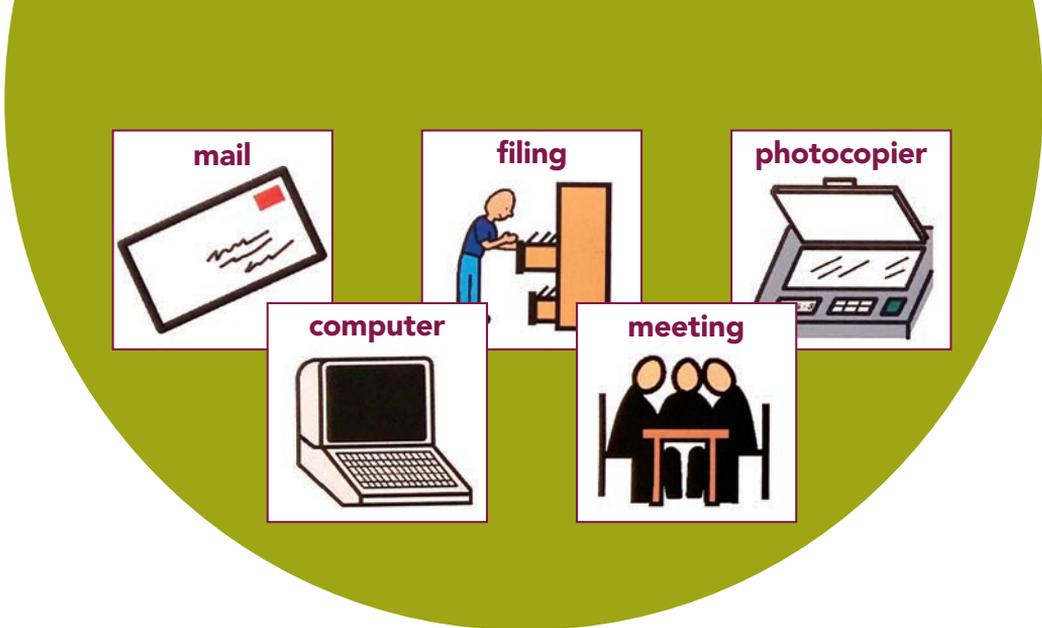
You will find that prompts are required more at the beginning of learning a new task. The types of prompts used will depend on the person and amount of help they need with the task. The purpose of this is to gradually help the person to perform the task independently.

You might start by modelling the task while explaining what you are doing, step by step. Use physical prompts, if necessary, to help people with things like how to stand and position their body and place their hands to do a task. Before using physical prompts, it is important to ask permission from the person first and explain why they are necessary. Describe verbally while you are using physical prompts. Replace the physical prompts as soon as you can, and just use verbal prompts or gestures. Fade out the prompts as they become more confident with the task.

It is really important to give the person time to process and respond after a prompt. Don't jump in too quickly or leave it for a long time before they give the correct response.

Remember to always give appropriate positive feedback when teaching tasks. This encourages the person in their learning, and lets them know that they are performing the task correctly.





## Using visual supports

We all use supports to remember things in our everyday lives. Many of us depend on our diaries, timetables, to-do lists and apps to remind us of meetings, appointments, important occasions and what we need to buy at the shops. We increasingly use how-to videos on YouTube to learn how to do things. We depend on signs to find places, remind us of road rules and help us to stay safe. Whether words, pictures or videos, these are all visual supports.

We know that people with Down syndrome are strong visual learners. This means information they see is more easily understood than information they hear. Using symbols, pictures, photographs, videos and gestures to support communication and learning can be very successful.

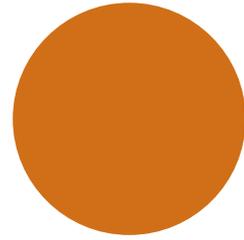
Visual supports are static, concrete symbols, so they help people to process information and organise their thinking. They help people remember the information, and they help to reduce anxiety by providing reassurance.

Visual aids can also simplify information, such as how to do a task, by breaking it down into core components, and also provide a link between spoken and visual information.

The aim of visual supports is not to replace spoken communication but rather to support it. This can increase a person's competence, independence and confidence in carrying out their role. Visual supports can also help the person to communicate to others, decreasing the frustration of not being understood, and supporting appropriate workplace behaviour.

You can use visual supports in many ways. Remember to base the use of visual supports on what your employee needs. Discuss this with the person, and their support network if appropriate, to find out what will work best for them. If they already use visual supports successfully, it's good to have a look at them to produce work place supports in a similar style. All visual supports should use Easy Read text alongside the visual supports. Some useful visual supports are:

- daily schedules or timetables
- to-do lists
- instructions and procedures
- task support
- signs



## **Planning for the working day**

Employees with Down syndrome often find it useful to have a visual schedule that they can refer to during the working day. It helps them to see which tasks need doing, and when to do them, as well as reminding them when to take their breaks.

Because people with Down syndrome have varying literacy skills. Some people will find a written schedule works for them; other employees may need a schedule with images as well as some simple, Easy Read text.

It is important to work with the person to create the schedule so that it works best for them as an individual. You should also go through the schedule with them to make sure they understand it.

It's helpful to keep the schedule in the area where the person does most of their work, or on a clipboard, or at their own work station if they have one. If the schedule is laminated, they can tick each task off. Then it can be wiped at the end of the day.

Schedules can also be kept on the person's phone or a work iPad. Many people with Down syndrome (with varying literacy skills) use apps to remind them to do certain things at certain times; you could do this in the workplace as a portable work schedule.

## Example 1

This schedule was developed for someone in an office/administration setting. It is text only as this employee needs good literacy skills as part of their job. However, an office worker who doesn't have tasks that require these skills might need a more visual schedule, so you could add images as well as simple text. Some people find it helpful to have a photo of themselves doing a task. You might also have photos like this for training and to reinforce how a task is done.

Time	Task	Completed
8:45am–9:00am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Arrive at work and put personal items away</li><li>• Make a tea or coffee if you need one</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9:00am–9:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Start work</li><li>• Log onto computer</li><li>• Check email and calendar for the day</li><li>• Speak with your manager about tasks for the day</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9:45am–10:30am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Set up for meeting room for any meeting for that day</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10:30am–10:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Short break - Have morning tea</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10:45am–11:45am	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do any filing</li><li>• Do any photocopying</li><li>• Do any scanning</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11:45am–12:15pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Open the mail</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12:15pm–1:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lunch</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1:00pm–1:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Deliver the mail to the right people</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1:30pm–2:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Check emails and reply</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2:00pm–2:45pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Continue any filing, photocopying and scanning</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2:45pm–3:00pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Collect and put stamps on any mail that has to go out</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3:00pm–3:25pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Pack up meeting rooms after meeting</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3:30pm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finish day, pack up and go home</li></ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Example 2

This schedule was developed for a man who works in a beachside shop. The employee doesn't read, so his work duties don't require literacy skills. (He does some of his tasks, such as filling shelves by matching labels on packets). His visual schedule includes various images of him doing his regular daily tasks, as well as other images. You could also just have pictures of the job e.g. a broom for sweeping, or a carton of milk to represent filling the milk fridge.

If your employees sometimes do different tasks each day, you can still use a visual schedule. Have a laminated A4 schedule, with Velcro dots. Attach Velcro to the back of laminated pictures of the job or the person doing a particular job; you can keep these in a plastic lunchbox or similar. Attach the jobs for that day, have it in their workspace and go through the schedule with the person at the beginning of their day. When they have done a task, they can take it off the schedule and put it in the container. Remember to include pictures for tea breaks and lunch.

**Employee name:**

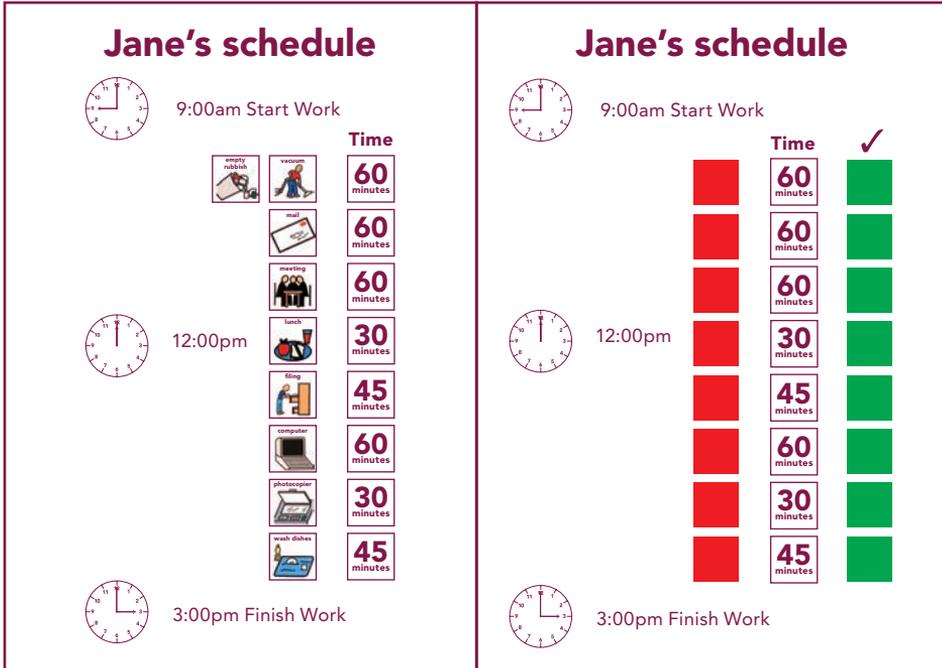
**Job done**

	Sweep outside	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Sweep inside	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Morning break	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Milk fridge	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Fill up crackers	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Break down the boxes and put in the skip	<input type="checkbox"/>
	All done! Time to go home	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Example 3

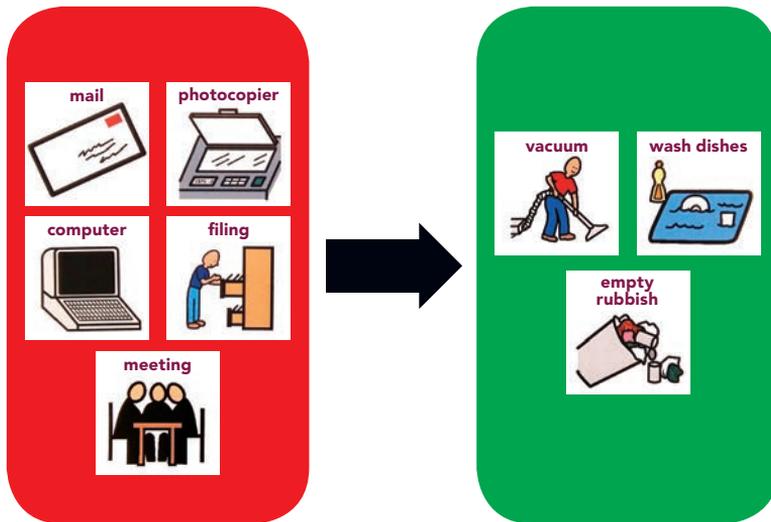
These timetables can be used when tasks have to be done at or within a set time, or in a specific order. The person could use a visual timer to help with this such as: a stopwatch; kitchen or bookmark timer; or an app on their phone or iPad.

You could include a tick box to help show which tasks have been completed, or the person could remove tasks from the timetable.



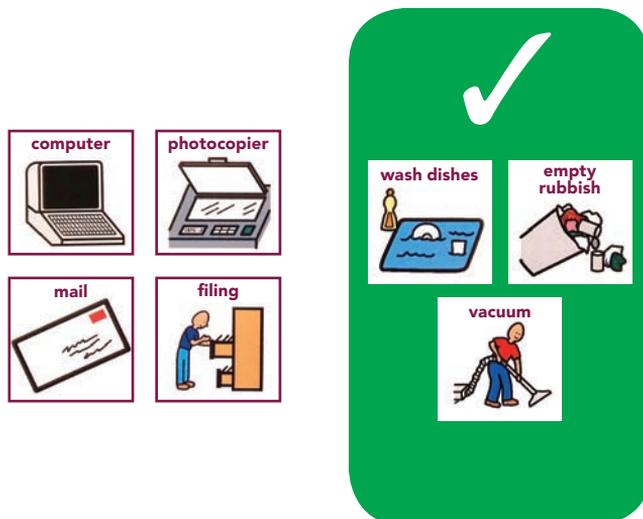
### Example 4

This visual support helps a person remember which tasks need to be done, and shows when all daily tasks have been done. The person moves the task from red to green when they have completed it. In this example, the tasks don't need to be done in a specific order or in a set time. You can use a felt board or velcro strips on a laminated board then laminate the tasks and use Velcro dots on the back to attach them. Some people may use an app on their phone or iPad.



### Example 5

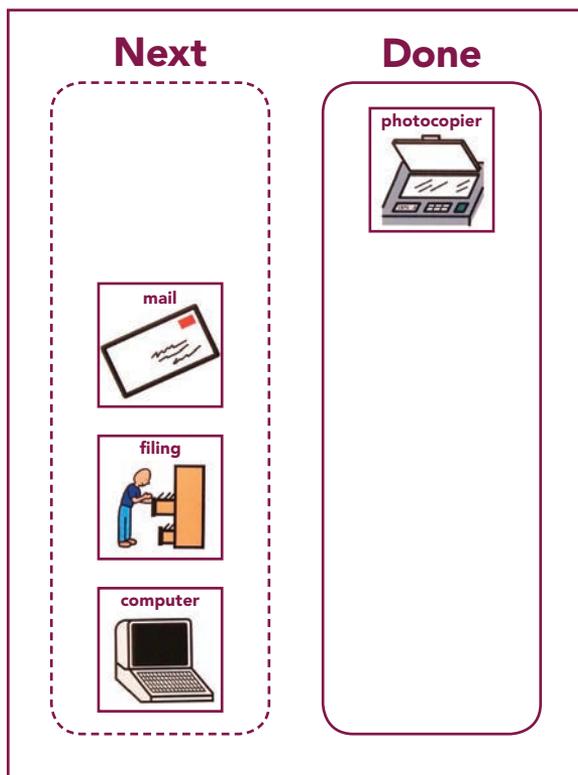
In this example, the person moves tasks to the green side when they have been completed. Again, the tasks don't need to be done in a set order or time.



## Example 6

This example can be used when tasks need to be done in a specific order. The person moves them from 'next' to 'done'.

The images in these examples are PECS (Picture Exchange Communication Symbols) but you can use other images according to what works best for the person.



## Instructions and procedures

You can use visual instructions and procedures for a range of tasks.

They help to:

- break down the task
- make sure tasks are done the right way and in the right order
- increase independence
- increase productivity

Here are some examples:

### Example 1

Step-by-step checklists are a simple way to present procedures. The visuals break down the task into simple steps and the tick box helps the person move from one step to the next.



## Example 2

You can show instructions as an image strip using photos of the task at each stage of completion. Use short, simple text with the photos to provide additional information.



## Task support

Visual supports can be used in a large variety of ways to help employees complete their tasks. The idea is to use simple images to provide reminders that will help the person to effectively complete the task. There are no rules about how they can be used – the key is to be creative! You're likely to find that the visuals help all staff, not just those with Down syndrome.

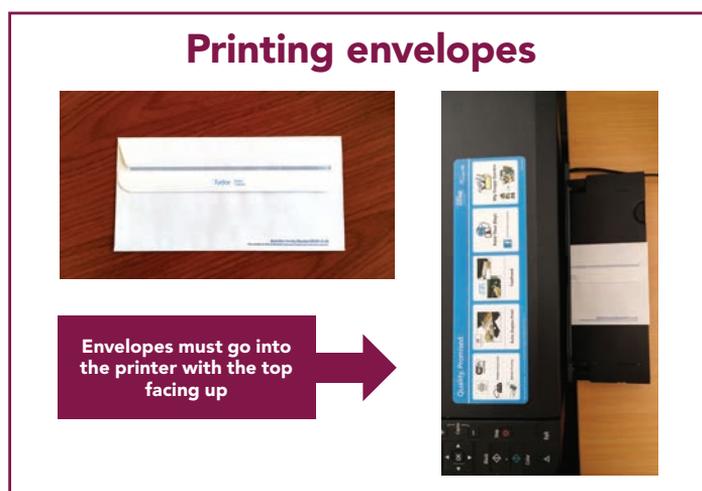
## Example 1

Think about the way items are filed or organised. Could filing be colour coded? In this example, a library system uses symbols to represent the category rather than a formal coding system. Symbol stickers are placed on each book and the employee matches these to the symbol on the bookshelf when re-shelving items.



## Example 2

Small reminders cut down on errors. In this example, images and simple text show the correct way to load envelopes into the printer.



## Signs

Signs in the workplace are important for all of us, to help us find things and people, and help keep us safe. Here are some examples:

- First aid kit location.
- Work colleagues' names on doors. By adding their photos you help employees with Down syndrome and others who don't know all the staff well.
- In/out staff board. Again, you could add photos.
- Exit signs and emergency exit routes.
- Workplace facilities such as toilets and lunch room.

## Other tips for supporting your employee with Down syndrome

There are many ways you can help your employee to be successful in the workplace. Here are some things that will help:

- Remember that your employee with Down syndrome is a unique individual with their own strengths and qualities – fitting these to the right role and tailoring their training and workplace support will bring benefits to all.

- Be open, patient, and flexible – small changes in the workplace can lead to significant positive outcomes.
- Everybody needs to work together – ensure the other members of the team are also aware of how they can support the new employee in the workplace.
- Tap into the supports available – some employees may have support from a Disability Employment Service (DES). Others may have a support person funded through their NDIS plan. As an employer, you may be able to get financial help from the government to provide adaptive equipment or produce visual aids. See the companion resource, *A Guide for Employers*, for this and other useful information.
- Have regular meetings – these should always include the employee, employer and any other people who know the person well or are providing any support in relation to the workplace (e.g. family, carers, support workers, Disability Employment Service).
- Contact your state or territory Down syndrome organisation if you have any questions.



## Associations

### New South Wales

#### **Down Syndrome Association of NSW Inc.**

T: (02) 9841 4444  
E: [admin@dsansw.org.au](mailto:admin@dsansw.org.au)  
W: [www.downsyndromensw.org.au](http://www.downsyndromensw.org.au)

### Victoria

#### **Down Syndrome Victoria**

T: (03) 9486 9600  
Toll Free 1300 658 873  
F: (03) 9486 9601  
E: [info@dsav.asn.au](mailto:info@dsav.asn.au)  
W: [www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au](http://www.downsyndromevictoria.org.au)

### Queensland

#### **Down Syndrome Queensland**

T: (07) 3356 6655  
E: [office@dsaq.org.au](mailto:office@dsaq.org.au)  
W: [www.dsaq.org.au](http://www.dsaq.org.au)

### South Australia

#### **Down Syndrome South Australia**

T: (08) 8245 4600  
F: (08) 8346 4521  
E: [info@downssa.asn.au](mailto:info@downssa.asn.au)  
W: [www.downssa.asn.au](http://www.downssa.asn.au)

### Western Australia

#### **Down Syndrome WA**

T: (08) 9368 4002  
Toll free 1800 623 544  
F: (08) 9368 4006  
E: [admin@downsyndromewa.org.au](mailto:admin@downsyndromewa.org.au)  
W: [www.downsyndromewa.org.au](http://www.downsyndromewa.org.au)

### Tasmania

#### **Down Syndrome Tasmania Inc.**

T: 1300 592 050  
E: [info@downsyndrometasmania.org.au](mailto:info@downsyndrometasmania.org.au)  
W: [www.downsyndrometasmania.org.au](http://www.downsyndrometasmania.org.au)

### Northern Territory

#### **Down Syndrome Association NT**

T: (08) 8985 6222  
F: (08) 8985 6266  
E: [admin@downsyndroment.com.au](mailto:admin@downsyndroment.com.au)  
W: [www.downsyndroment.com.au](http://www.downsyndroment.com.au)

### Australian Capital Territory

#### **Down Syndrome Association of ACT Inc.**

T: (02) 6290 0656  
F: (02) 6290 0656  
E: [admin@actdsa.asn.au](mailto:admin@actdsa.asn.au)  
W: [www.actdsa.org.au](http://www.actdsa.org.au)



[downsyndrome.org.au](http://downsyndrome.org.au)