Set Boundaries
Give your child clear routines e.g. in the morning, at mealtimes and bedtime.

Routines can:
- Give children security;
- Teach children self-discipline;
- Eliminate power struggles;
- Help children to understand concepts and language of time;
- Help children to understand what is expected of them;
- Help parents to maintain consistency in expectations.

Children with Down syndrome are strong visual learners, so visuals are often helpful for children to learn a routine. Please bear in mind that lots of visual routines, such as the examples below, can be found online. However, children usually respond much better to a personalised visual routine, using photographs of them in their own surroundings. This is much more meaningful.
Some children may find a visual schedule, even with photographs, too difficult to understand. They may respond better to an object schedule. This is where objects are used in a sequence rather than pictures. The child literally lifts each object and uses them in the order given.

Children are often asked to use a First/Then visual schedule when they start in an educational setting. You can get them used to this at home. Use First/Then in your daily language with your child. For example, First finish your dinner, Then outside to play.

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- Child lifts fork and uses it to eat lunch.
- Child takes cloth to sink and wipes face.
- Child takes toothbrush to sink and brushes teeth.
- Child takes comb to mirror and combs hair.
Supporting Good Communication
Consider what you child might be trying to communicate to you through their behaviour. Problem behaviours are sometimes caused by the frustration of not being able to communicate. Helping your child to communicate effectively through spoken word, gesture or Makaton can prevent some behaviour issues. One way that you can communicate your expectations is through the use of social stories. A social story is a small booklet with visual cues which tells children what to expect in a particular situation. You may outline clearly how you expect your child to behave. Again, photographs are usually best.

Model Good Behaviour
Children with Down syndrome will often imitate the behaviour of those around them. Therefore it is important to be a good role model for your child and demonstrate the behaviour you expect from them.

Self-care
In order to be able to model positive behaviour, parents must be feeling positive about themselves.

Are you keeping yourself healthy?
- Diet – healthy food and plenty of water
- Sleep
- Opportunities for relaxation
- Exercise
- Regular health screening
- Socialisation with family and friends

Your child’s brain develops at a very fast rate in the first two years. Social and emotional experiences, both positive and negative, are wired into the brain as part of this brain development. This sets a template for emotional health and behaviour.
Developing Social Skills
Try to ensure that your child has plenty of opportunities to socialise and play with peers. This may be through family connections, friends or local toddler groups and activities. Your child should be encouraged to share toys and take turns. Most repetitive play activities can be used to teach turn-taking.

Suggestions for turn-taking activities:
- Build a jigsaw together
- Build a tower from bricks
- Putting shapes in a shape sorter
- Hopscotch
- Rolling a ball to one another
- Playing a musical instrument
- Pressing buttons on a toy
- Giant snakes and ladders
- Commercial games such as *Kerplunk* or *Don’t Break the Ice*

Use the language ‘Your turn!’ and ‘My turn!’ If necessary, you can use a turn-taking visual to reinforce this concept.

If your child finds it difficult to share, it might also be useful to introduce a timer. Sand timers are a great visual way of showing a child how much time they have left with a particular toy. You can also get some child-friendly timer apps to download.
Praise and Rewards
Behaviours which are rewarded will usually increase. Therefore **we want to reward any good behaviour** displayed by your child. This may be through verbal or non-verbal praise, or through a tangible or intangible reward.

Praise should always be immediate and specific. Use a positive and enthusiastic tone of voice, make eye contact and speak at the child’s level if possible. Praise can be said and signed.

- Wait until the child is complying before giving verbal praise.
- Try to avoid general praise such as ‘Good boy’ or ‘Good girl’.
- Praise your child’s efforts, not just their achievements.
- Older children may also respond to proximal praise. This is where we enthusiastically praise other children (maybe a sibling) in the vicinity who are behaving appropriately (‘Great sitting at the dinner table, John! Thank you!’) with the hope that others will imitate their behaviour, and then they will also receive praise.

**Tip:** Remind yourself to praise your child by filling one pocket with pennies. Each time you praise your child, move a penny to your other pocket until they have all been moved.
Suggestions for non-verbal praise:

- high five
- smile
- wink
- thumbs up
- fist bump

Intangible rewards are often best, as children can become demanding if they are frequently rewarded with toys or food. For example:

- Time playing a game with parent
- Blowing bubbles
- A shared story
- Trip to the park

For young children, rewards need to be immediate, so that they understand it is linked to the positive behaviour they have just demonstrated. Simple reward charts can be used as children get older.
Celebrate Success
Try celebrating your child’s achievements and positive behaviour by making an ‘I can’ book. Stick in pictures and write notes about what they can do. For example:

- I can help to brush my teeth.
- I can share a game with my sister.
- I can climb the step by myself.
- I can sign ‘thank you.
- I can help mummy bring in the shopping.
- I can hold daddy’s hand and do good walking.

Read the ‘I can’ book regularly with your child and try to add to it regularly. Try to think particularly about celebrating good behaviour.

Identify Causes of Negative Behaviours
If your child is displaying a negative behaviour, which needs to be changed, it is important to try and work out why they are behaving that way.

Behaviour is a form of communication. Negative behaviours may be:
- Attention seeking
- To get out of doing something
- Requesting something
- A sensory need/overload
- Expressing anxiety
- Communicating emotion or pain

One way to begin to understand what your child is trying to communicate is by keeping a behaviour diary. Keep a note of when and where your child exhibits the challenging behaviour, what happened beforehand and what the consequence of this behaviour was. Patterns of negative behaviour may help you to understand how to begin to tackle the problem.
Strategies for Dealing with Negative Behaviours

- Spend at least 15 minutes a day playing individually with your child, allowing them to direct the play and decide what they would like to do. Spending time with your child, playing, encouraging and supporting them will foster a positive relationship which will help enormously when you need to deal with any negative behaviour.

- Ensure that you give clear and positive commands e.g. First we need to tidy up... Then it’s time for lunch. Be positive e.g. ‘Let’s have walking feet’ rather than ‘No running’.

- Be careful with your language – avoid questions such as ‘Now, shall we go for a bath?’ if really there is no choice about whether your child has a bath or not!

- Where possible, give your child lots of choices where they can have some degree of control. For example, ‘Time to get dressed! Jeans or leggings?’ In this example, there is no choice about getting dressed but there is a choice about what to wear.

- Ignoring - attention seeking behaviour which is not causing harm or damage may be ignored.
  - Think of the behaviour you want to ignore e.g. shouting;
  - Think of the opposite behaviour e.g. quiet voice. Plan to praise any instances of the positive opposite behaviour;
  - When the negative behaviour occurs, calmly ignore it – this means not giving any eye contact or verbal attention;
  - When the behaviour stops, immediately return your attention and quickly move on and distract with a new activity.
- Distracting or re-directing – where a child is beginning to misbehave, try distracting them or re-directing them quickly to a new activity.
- Ensure that consequences for negative behaviour are appropriate and logical e.g. if a child is fighting over a toy or a game, remove the toy.
- A social story can be used to address a particular negative behaviour which your child is displaying.

**Calm Down Strategy**
Try to teach your child about ways to calm down when they feel angry or frustrated. This might mean teaching them to go to a safe space, take deep breaths, cuddle a teddy or use some calm down toys. You might use a teddy or a puppet to demonstrate and practice a calm down strategy while your child is calm.
Public/Private Behaviour
Children with Down syndrome sometimes struggle to understand the difference between public and private behaviour. They will need to be explicitly taught the difference between the two, and it’s good to start this from an early age. Tell your child exactly what kind of behaviour and body parts are private. Make some privacy rules (e.g. shut the door when you are using the bathroom, knock on the bedroom door before you go in) and make sure everyone in the house sticks to them.

Other Peoples’ Expectations
You may find that other people may have different expectations than you regarding your child’s behaviour. If other people are caring for your child (family, childminder, day care etc.), ensure that you discuss your expectations with them. Provide them with any strategies you have found to be helpful to manage behaviour.