Typical Speech and Language difficulties for children with Downs’s syndrome.

- Children with DS often have a speech and language impairment and are often late starting to talk.
- They also follow a pattern of language development which differs from typical development.
- They have significant delay in speech and language production relative to their non verbal abilities.
- **However they are often keen communicators** - they can use and understand sign, gesture and body language to support and develop their communication skills.
- Vocabulary is learned slowly & steadily – especially nouns
- Expressive – Receptive gap – children with DS can understand more than they can say.
- Early grammar is delayed and learned slowly & is paced by the size of the child’s vocabulary - need to acquire a vocabulary of approx. 300 words before developing and applying grammar)
- Will often speak using key words and leaving out the connecting words - “telegraphic” speech e.g. “sit chair”
- Spoken grammar lags behind understanding
- More complex grammar specifically delayed
- Smaller vocabulary = less general knowledge.
- Problems with articulation may result in the child being unwilling to speak in longer sentences and they may self-limit as a result.
- Difficulties understanding the specific language of the curriculum.

**Strengths**
- Often keen and natural communicators
- Often good social interaction skills
- Visual skills
- Signing and gesture, understanding body language, facial expression etc

**Speech and Language can be compromised by**
- Hearing difficulties
- Difficulties with Auditory attention & Auditory memory - listening, staying focused, ability to process & retain information
- Difficulties with auditory discrimination.

**Signing**
- Research shows children with DS do **not** learn words easily from speech input alone
- All benefit from up to 100 signs with spoken word.
- Children have larger vocabularies when in sign supported programmes 25% of 4 year olds still need to use sign as major mode of communication and should be taught new signs alongside speech and reading
- Signing is a bridge for spoken language - “keyword” signs augment speech.
- Signing will not inhibit speech but promote it.
• Signs dropped as children learn to talk.
• Signing reduces frustration – helps communication.

How to help
• Make use of child’s strong visual skills & support all language **visually**—
gesture and sign, pictures, print, drawings & symbols and concrete objects.
• Surround by **good language models**.
• Use simple, direct language. Clear, concise instructions.
• Phrase questions which require more than a yes/no.
• Give extra time for child to process and organize response.
• Work on speech sounds - accurate production /articulation skills
• Target comprehension & vocabulary through games & reading to acquire 300-
  word level (when grammar kicks in) by age 5-6.
• Practice sentence structure
• Use ‘carrier phrases’ to help develop sentences:
  I like…..I want….
• Teach prepositions through games.
• Develop reading
• Teach grammar through reading.
• Conversation diary.
  Develop listening and attention skills
• Develop memory skills
• Develop articulation and letter sound games
• Use a home-school Diary to develop communication between child and home
  and school—insert drawings / photos, key words and phrases etc.