

Behavior Changes in Individuals with Down Syndrome

Adult Down Syndrome Center | February 23, 2023

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We are  AdvocateAuroraHealth

Please note:

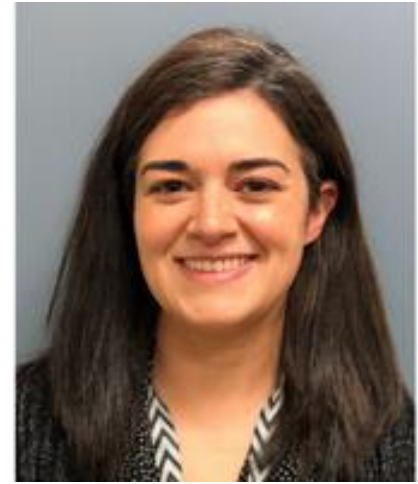
- This webinar is intended for families, caregivers, health care professionals, and service providers of individuals with Down syndrome.
- The information in this webinar is provided for educational purposes only and is not intended to serve as a substitute for a medical, psychiatric, mental health, or behavioral evaluation, diagnosis, or treatment plan by a qualified professional.
- We recommend that you bring specific questions about an individual with Down syndrome to their medical and/or therapy providers.



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Agenda

- Define behavior change.
- Identify reasons for behavior changes.
- Discuss strategies and solutions to address behavior changes.

What is a behavior change?

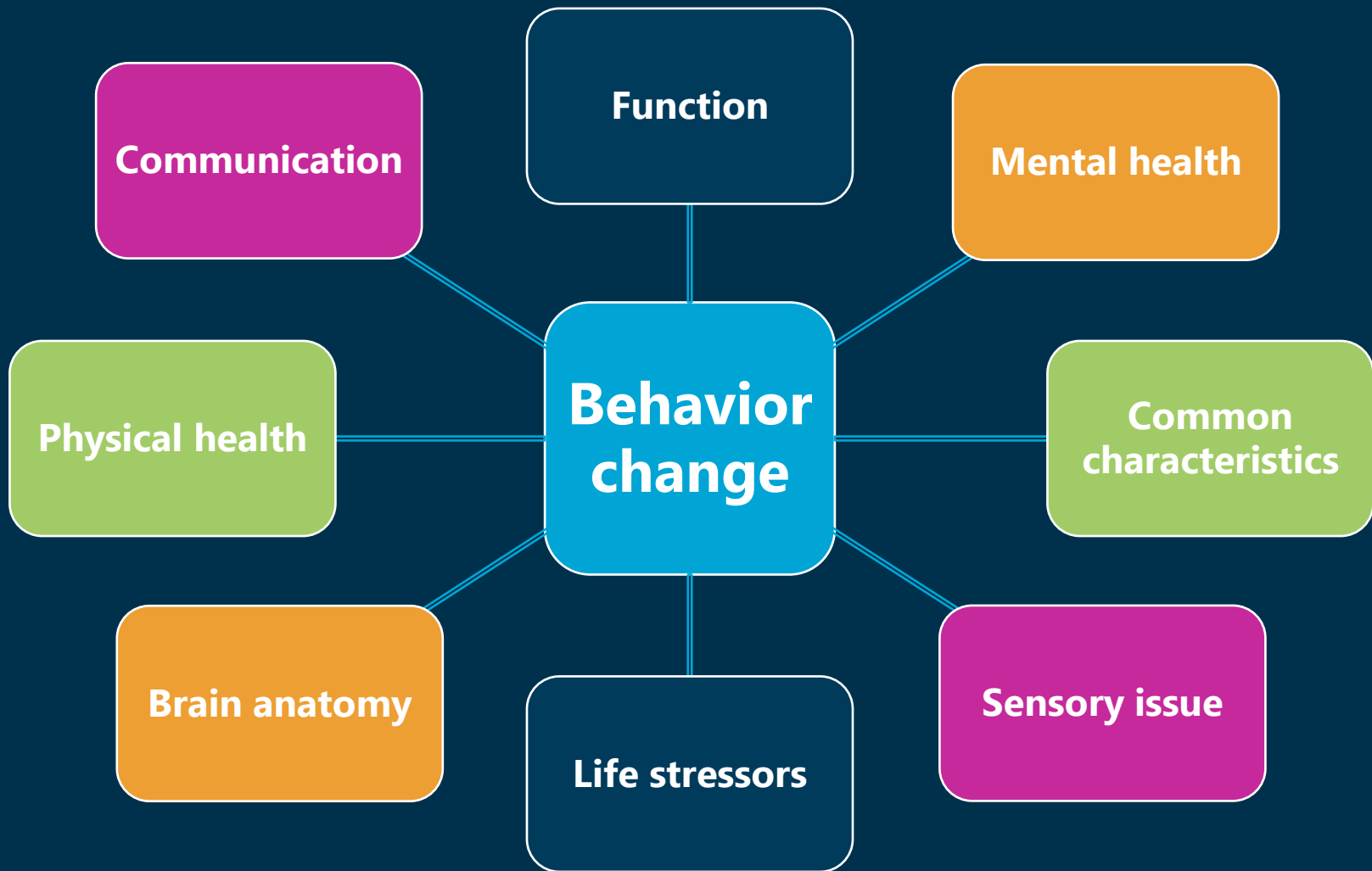
Definition

A **new** action or pattern of actions that are **atypical** for an individual

Important to note

- Behavior change...
 - Is not always bad.
 - Does not always need to be addressed.
 - Is a natural part of development and aging.

What can cause a behavior change?



Function

Mental health

**Common
characteristics**

Sensory issue

Life stressors

Brain anatomy

Physical health

Communication

**Behavior
change**

Physical health

- Pain
- Vitamin B12 deficiency
- Celiac disease or other GI issues
- Vision or hearing impairment
- Sleep apnea
- Hypothyroidism
- Hyperthyroidism
- Atlantoaxial instability
- Alzheimer's disease

Common characteristics

- Self-talk
- The “groove”
- Visual memory
- Empathy radar

Brain anatomy

- Different brain structure
- Pre-frontal cortex: impulse control, emotional regulation, higher reasoning, executive functioning
- Hippocampus: learning and memory
- Cerebellum: language and memory processing

Mental health

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder
- Down syndrome regression disorder

Life stressors

- Changes in routine
- Situations at school or work
- Friendships and relationships
- Grief, loss

Function

- What purpose is the behavior serving for the individual?
- Attention, Access, Escape/Avoid, Sensory
- Look at setting events, environment, antecedents, consequences
- A piece of figuring out how to address the behavior

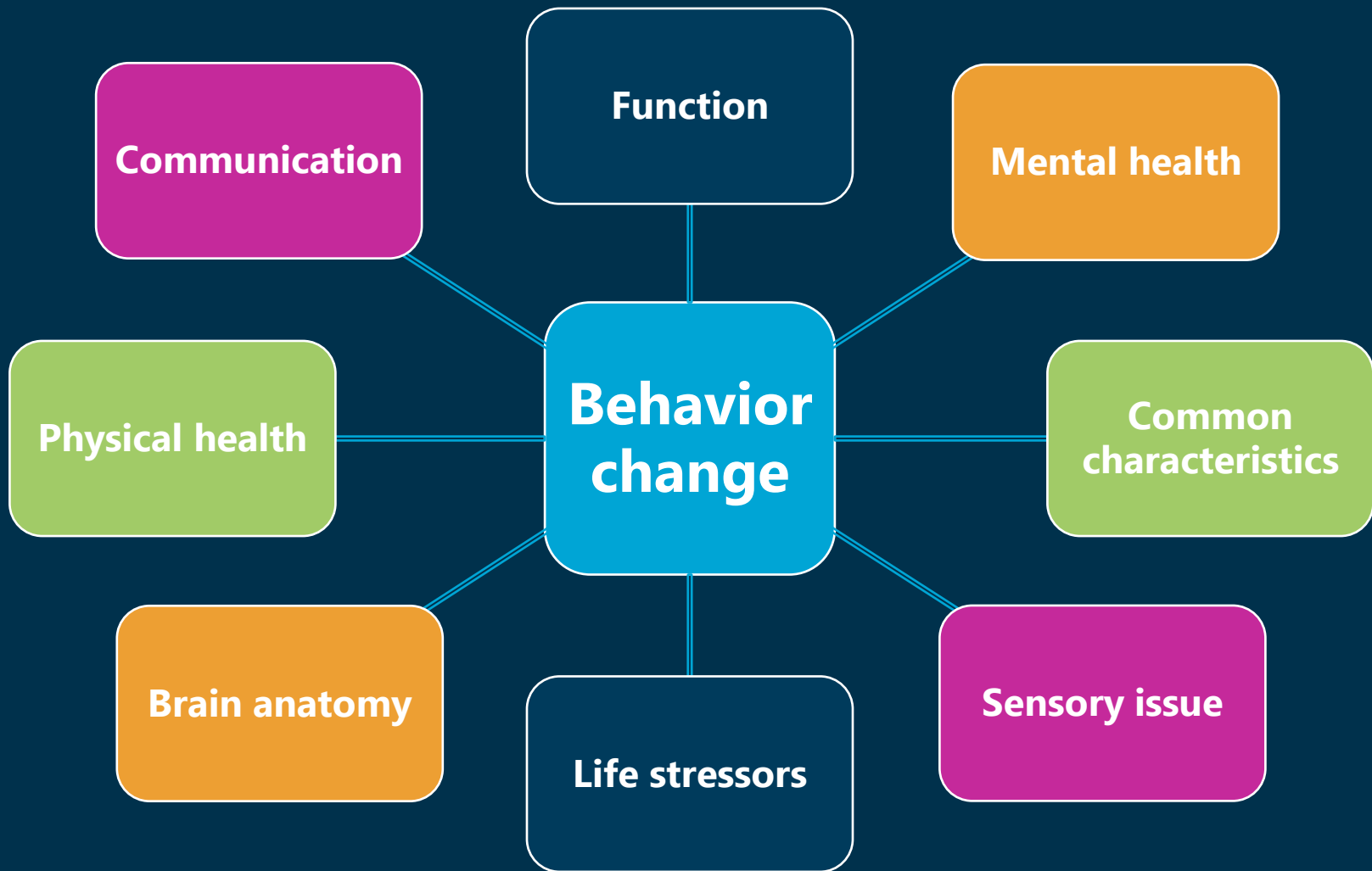
Communication

- Receptive versus expressive language skills
- How does the person communicate?

Sensory issue

- Problems with the ability to process information received through the senses
 - Sight, sound, touch, taste, smell
 - Muscles/joints (proprioception)
 - Balance (vestibular)
 - Internal (interoception)

How do we address behavior changes?



Function

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**Behavior
change**

Physical health

- Regular check-ups
- Exercise and healthy eating
- Staying hydrated
- Getting good sleep
- Vaccines
- Medication management
- Screening

Common characteristics

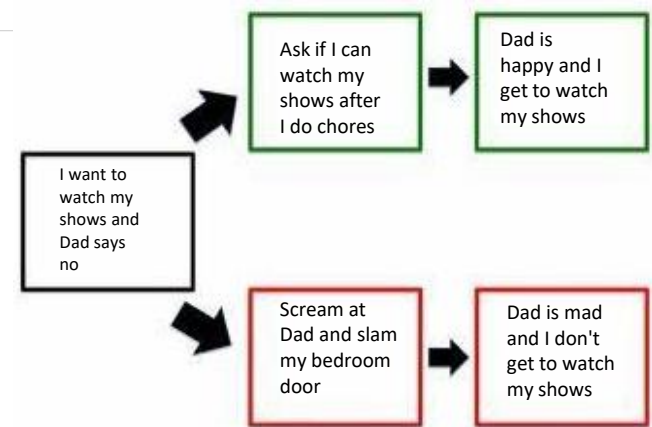
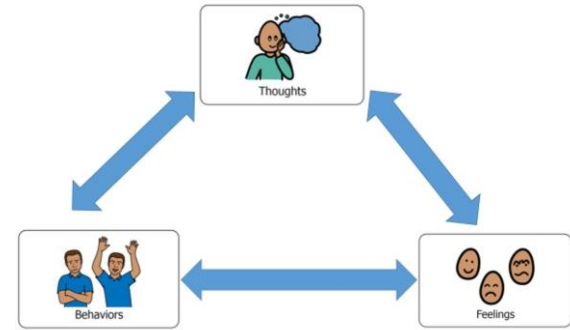
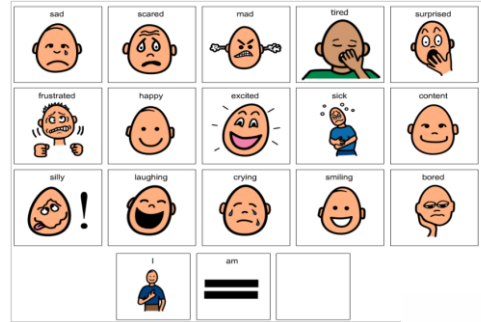
- Visuals
- Modeling
- Routine
- Concrete teaching
- Tell what to do instead of what not to do

Brain anatomy

- Repetition
- Simple language
- Allow processing time
- Visuals
- Positive, direct language

Mental health

- Counseling
- Medication
- Teach coping strategies
- Encourage activities and engagement
- Remember empathy radar



Life stressors

- Prepare when you can
- Reduce unnecessary stressors
- Create plans
- Counseling

Function

Function	Strategies
Attention	Seeking: check-ins, special jobs, dedicated time to share interests, opportunities for more interaction during the day, regular praise Avoiding: breaks, teach social skills for declining attention
Access (items/activities/locations)	Reward systems, giving choices, plan/schedule time for access, visual timers
Escape/avoidance	Allow breaks, teach coping strategies, arrange the environment, prep for transitions
Sensory	Movement breaks, sound cancelling headphones, adjust lighting, quiet spaces, sensory tools

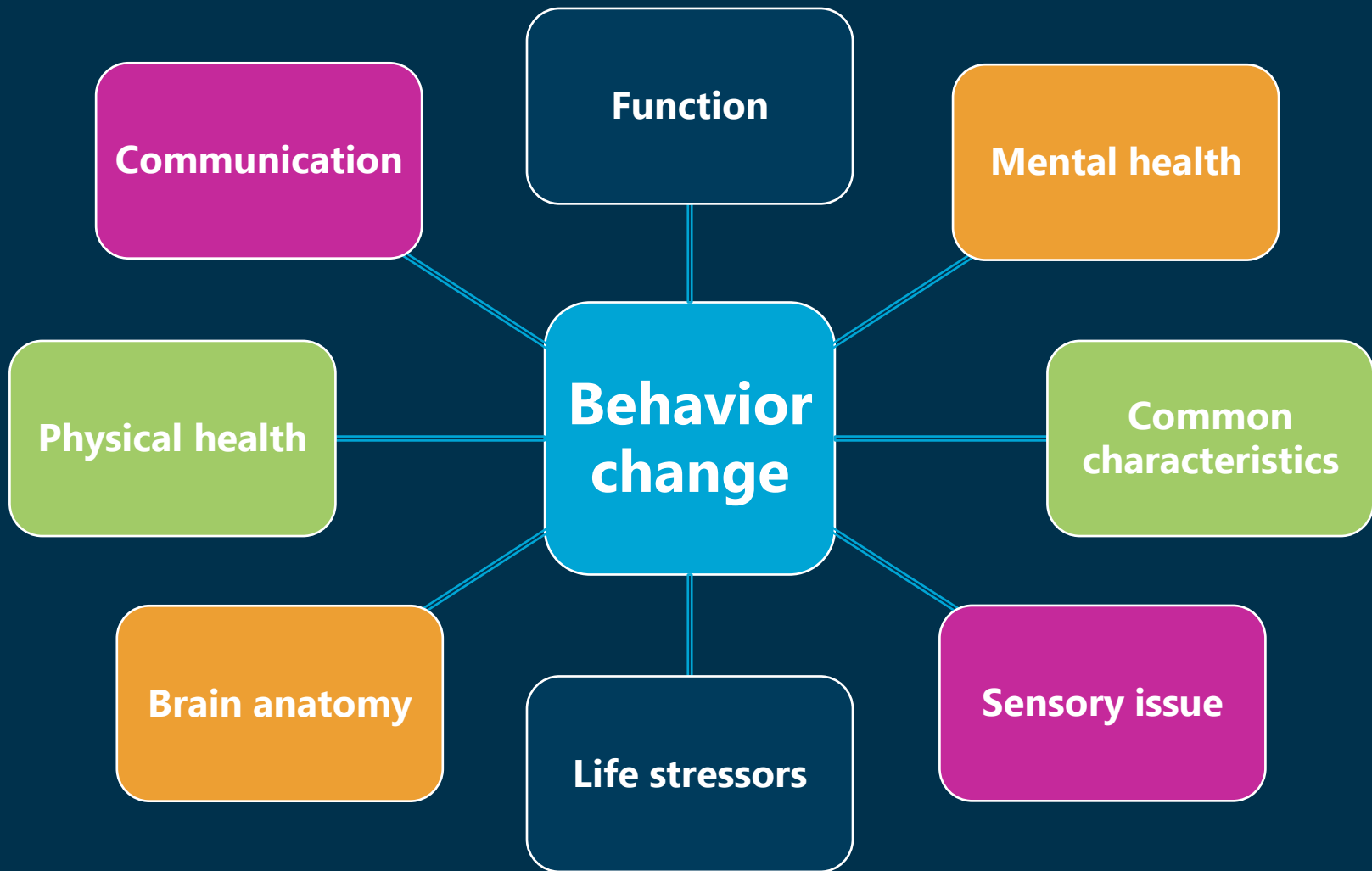
Communication

- Communication supports
 - Visuals, low-tech, communication devices
- Receptive and expressive language

Sensory issue

- Sensory diet
 - Planned and structured activity program that is highly individualized
 - Helps prevent sensory and emotional overload by satisfying the body's needs.

Case examples



Function

Mental health

**Common
characteristics**

Sensory issue

Life stressors

Brain anatomy

Physical health

Communication

**Behavior
change**

Case example 1 - Keith

- 30-year-old male
- Works at a grocery store
- Recently started refusing to do tasks other than bagging groceries

Keith- causes of behavior

- Physical health: none
- Common characteristics: change in self-talk
- Brain anatomy: none
- Mental health: none
- Life stressors: none
- Function: attention from cashier
- Communication: difficulty expressing feelings effectively
- Sensory: not currently a concern

Keith- strategies

- Common characteristics:
 - Is it problematic or could it return to baseline with other strategies?
- Function:
 - Designated times with cashier or earning break time with the cashier if cashier agrees
 - Teach appropriate ways to gain attention while doing other tasks
 - Have cashier check in and praise when other tasks are completed
- Communication:
 - Teach effective workplace communication
 - Teach boundaries

Case example 2 - Jodie

- 17-year-old female
- Increased time spent on morning routine
- Recently has appeared more withdrawn and sits alone at lunch while at school

Jodie- causes of behavior

- Physical health: hypothyroidism (previous diagnosis)
- Common characteristics: change in the groove
- Brain anatomy: none
- Mental health: depression (new diagnosis)
- Life stressors: death of grandparent, older sibling left for college, teacher on maternity leave
- Function: none
- Communication: communication device on loan
- Sensory: none

Jodie- strategies

- Physical health
 - Adjust thyroid medication
- Common characteristics:
 - Is it problematic or could it return to baseline with other strategies?
- Mental health
 - Consider medication and/or counseling
- Life stressors:
 - Consider counseling
 - Positive talk about the missing people (grandparent/sibling/teacher)
 - Use of social stories to help understand death, moving, etc.
- Communication:
 - Repair communication device or individualize temporary one-provide alternative low-tech communication if needed



After the cause of a behavior is addressed, “unlearning” the behavior can take time.

Wrap-up


- A change in behavior is a new action or pattern of actions that are atypical for the individual.
- Not all new behaviors need to be changed.
- There are a variety of factors that can contribute to a change in behavior.
- The strategies to address behavior change can be unique to one contributing factor or overlap with a few contributing factors.
- Unlearning the behavior can take time once it is addressed.


Resource Library


Advocate Medical Group
Adult Down Syndrome Center


I'm looking for...  MENU 


Resource Library | All Resources





 **People with Down Syndrome**





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