

## New Parents

The first thing we want to say is **CONGRATULATIONS** on the birth or impending birth of your baby!

**Have you just recently learned that your baby has Down syndrome?** You may be shocked by this news and feeling an array of emotions that you hadn't expected - we want you to know - you are not alone. The members and staff of Parent Advocates Down Syndrome would like to be a source of support and encouragement for you. There are excellent medical professionals, early intervention specialists and experienced parents here in Central Alabama who can offer a hopeful view of the life that lies ahead for your child and your family.

**The most important thing is to behold your baby** – look at your baby closely – every new parent needs to get to know and bond with their newborn. Your baby is the person you named. Your baby is not Down syndrome – it does not define who they are – they will however have to live with Down syndrome.

**Your baby with Down syndrome is more like other babies than different.** Who do they look like? What are his or her mannerisms? When any baby is born there is change at home. Please take care of yourself, accept help from family and friends, and celebrate the arrival of your newest family member.

**Time is a gift and is necessary for every parent** to grieve the life they had dreamed of for their baby while adjusting and embracing the new narrative for those future dreams. Extra patience may be needed as both mother and father, individually and as well as parent partners, process the news that their baby has Down syndrome. It may seem that the diagnosis of Down syndrome is dominating all your thoughts, conversations and time. It may feel like everyone is talking about differences, medical issues, and challenges that lie ahead for your baby and your family – BUT - hold on to these facts:

- **Your child is an unique individual and cannot be generalized by a diagnosis of Down syndrome**
- **In order to reach his/her full potential – your child will take a distinctive and deeply personal journey**
- **There is not one way to foresee a child's challenges or triumphs**
- **No one can predict a child's future**

**You may find that meeting or talking with other parents of children with Down syndrome can be a priceless experience.**

We have seen how helpful it is for new parent(s) of a child with Down syndrome to talk to willing, informed, knowledgeable and involved parents of an older child with Down syndrome. Experience is a great teacher, a genuine encourager and a wise counselor.

**Your family, close friends and those who know you, who were also anticipating this birth, might now be struggling with how to express their thoughts and feelings** to you concerning your baby with Down syndrome. Their silence or comments may unintentionally hurt or offend you, their remarks might sound trite and their actions appear disconnected. Try to be patient; overlook their awkwardness, instead search and listen for intent and meaning. They may not know anything about Down syndrome and may have never met anyone with Down syndrome.

**Introduce family and friends to your baby** – this is their opportunity to get to know your child. Some may even show initiative to gain knowledge about Down syndrome and because of your baby may become active advocates for your child and others with Down syndrome.

**This is just a start as you will undoubtedly have more questions as your baby grows.** Please ask questions – every question is important – none are trivial. If we don't have the answer, we will try to find someone who does.

**Time will give you the opportunity to become skilled at portraying Down syndrome in a positive manner to all those you encounter.** Our organization and many groups like us collectively create a rich human library of knowledge, stories, methods, experiences, referrals and solutions that you can draw upon as you discover, pursue and celebrate potential and quality of life for your child with Down syndrome.

### **VITAL FIRST STEPS:**

Bond with your baby	Select a Pediatrician
Thorough Medical Evaluation	Select Early Intervention Provider
Begin to learn about Down syndrome	Attend Support Group Meetings

*A Note from Julie -*

*"Initially, the New Parent Group was a safe place when I felt out of place. It was comforting to be among other parents who knew exactly what I was experiencing. I also found it so encouraging to meet parents with children a little older than mine. This group has been a sanctuary for me.*

*Practically speaking, the New Parent Group has been incredibly helpful. Each meeting was very informative and educational. So, not only am I gaining information but I am also acquiring social, medical and community contacts. The group has inspired me to reach out to DSA's newest parents who now walk in my shoes."*

**Down Syndrome Alabama**  
**Resources for EARLY INTERVENTION and HEALTH CARE**

**The Bell Center**

1700 29th Court South Homewood, AL 35209  
205-870-0081

[www.thebellcenter.org](http://www.thebellcenter.org)

For more than 25 years, The Bell Center for Early Intervention Programs has provided treatment for children with special needs through its therapy programs. The Bell Center offers treatment as soon as a child is diagnosed, often within a few days or weeks after birth. The program has provided dramatic results for the more than 1,000 children who have participated since its inception.

**Hand In Hand Early Learning Program**

120 Oslo Circle Birmingham, Al 35211  
205-944-3939

[www.ucpbham.com](http://www.ucpbham.com)

The Hand In Hand Early Intervention Program offers quality services and interventions that facilitate growth and development and allow children and families more independence within their community. It is a service for infants and toddlers with delays in development, diagnosed disabilities or children who are at risk for developmental delay during the first three years of life. All services are provided at no cost to the family.

**Alabama Early Intervention System (AEIS)**

1-800-543-3098 (or TTY 800-499-1816) [www.rehab.state.al.us/ei](http://www.rehab.state.al.us/ei)  
Or - Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services at 334-293-7500

When a new baby has a special need, families may require assistance in planning how to best care for their newest member. Alabama's Early Intervention System, a statewide system of resource access, support, and appropriate services can provide that assistance.

**Choosing a pediatrician is important.** Things to consider include a pediatrician's training and experience, as well as the office location, hours, and routines. One way to find a pediatrician is to ask families of other children with Down syndrome in your area for recommendations. A pediatrician who recognizes and respects a parent's questions, concerns and sees them as partners might be a good match for your family.

**Recommended Websites:**

[www.babycenter.com/0\\_welcoming-babies-with-down-syndrome\\_1817.bc](http://www.babycenter.com/0_welcoming-babies-with-down-syndrome_1817.bc)

[www.ndss.org](http://www.ndss.org)

[www.NDSCcenter@aol.com](mailto:www.NDSCcenter@aol.com)

[www.dsrf.org](http://www.dsrf.org)



**Congratulations on your New Baby!**

**Down Syndrome Alabama**  
*invites you to the*  
**New Parents Support Group**

Meet other new parents and parents of older children with Down syndrome  
Ask questions and share experiences  
Acquire information about Down syndrome  
Seek assistance in locating services and resources



**205-988-0810 or [downsyndromealabama@gmail.com](mailto:downsyndromealabama@gmail.com)**

**Visit our website at [downsyndromealabama.org](http://downsyndromealabama.org)**