

# Don't Let Down Those with Down Syndrome, Urge Experts

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DUBAI - Seeking acceptance of people with Down Syndrome in the mainstream society, the UAE Down Syndrome Association will be visiting 70 schools over the next two years to raise awareness and sensitising people not to look down upon those suffering from it.

Though some people with DS are already studying in some schools, the awareness levels on the syndrome remain low in the UAE, says Dr Eman Gaad, Senior Lecturer, British University in Dubai and Executive Director of UAE Down Syndrome Association.

"We will be visiting 70 schools in the next two years to raise awareness on the condition; initially, it will be five government and five private schools," she said, adding that schools with over 200 students would be top on the list for maximum impact.

"For acceptance in the society, people have to know what DS is," said Dr Gaad.

"Mental illness and intellectual disabilities are two different things and having a clear concept of these differences is essential before people with DS are fully accepted into the society," she added.

Dr Gaad said, "People with DS can study in mainstream schools alongside their normal counterparts but with a para-curriculum."

"We will be taking some people with DS along during our visits to the schools as part of the campaign," she said.

The association will also organise workshops, distribute leaflets, while the group will present scientific facts on the syndrome during the visits.

The aim of the association is to increase awareness on the disability in the society, promote inclusion into society; provide emergency professional support unit for parents and careers; and to establish a UAE data-based for Down Syndrome. Currently, no statistics are available on the disorder in the UAE.

What's down syndrome

**Down syndrome** is a set of mental and physical symptoms that result from having an extra copy of Chromosome 21, which changes the body's and brain's structure. Even though people with DS may have some physical and mental features in common, symptoms can range from mild to severe. Most people with DS have IQs that fall in the mild to moderate range of mental retardation. They may have delayed language development and slow motor development. Some common physical signs of DS include: Flat face with an upward slant to the eye, short neck, and abnormally shaped ears as well as small hands and feet. Besides, they may have several other health conditions, including hearing problems, eye problems, thyroid dysfunctions as well as dementia. DS is not a condition that can be cured. However, early medical intervention can help many people with DS live productive lives well into adulthood. The chance of having a baby with Down Syndrome increases as a woman gets older.

{Zawya}