

# Mental Health & Down syndrome

## Focusing on the Whole Person

Michele Mattox, LCSW, LISW-CP

**NO LIMITS**  
counseling & coaching







**Licensed Clinical Social Worker in NC & SC**

**20 years experience in various direct care roles in the I/DD community...  
the skills I address with clients and in groups are directly related to  
common mental health and relationship struggles I've observed in the  
community.**

**Mental Health Counseling for teens (16+) and adults with Down  
syndrome.**

**Relationship Coaching in the form of groups for all I/DD diagnoses.**

**Relationships & Boundaries Group**

**Dating Workshop**

**Sexuality Education**



This content is intended to educate and provide ideas for self-help and should not be used as a substitute for therapy or mental health care.





# 1% Better Everyday



**Chris Nikic.**  
A STORY OF PASSION AND DEDICATION





# What we know about Down syndrome



- Highly perceptive of others' emotions
- Prefer sameness
- Difficulty understanding passage of time
- Strong long term memory
- Sleep apnea, GI issues, thyroid issues



# How common characteristics may impact Mental Health

- Perceptive of others' emotions= concern over family members' health, observed stress in others, internalize/mimic others' emotions
- Prefer sameness= maybe in a negative routine/groove= takes time to transition out
- Difficulty recognizing passage of time= every time they think of a negative event= experience strong feelings like it just happened yesterday
- Strong long term memory= remember every detail of past events= negative events may elicit symptoms similar to PTSD
- Rule out medical conditions= sleep disturbances= irritability, thyroid issues= lethargic, GI issues= pain





# Target Areas- Focus on the Whole Person

- Cognition
- Self-Advocacy
- Psychoeducation
- Emotional literacy
- Coping skills
- Relationships, Boundaries & Sexuality Education
- Community Connections







# Cognitive Exercise

- Brain Games- memory card games, identifying differences in photos, name that tune, crossword puzzle, word search
- Meaningful conversations 5 minutes a day, asking open ended questions
- Socialization
- Eating well
- Physical activity





- Goal Setting
- Knowing their strengths & struggles, likes & dislikes
- Asking for help
- Speaking up for themselves
- Conflict resolution

# Self-Advocacy





MY MIND	ART, PUZZLES, WORD SEARCH, MUSIC, QUIET TIME, SIT OUTSIDE, READ, GAMES, CONNECT WITH A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER					
MY BODY	WEIGHTS, WALKING, YOGA, DANCING, HEALTHY EATING, GOOD SLEEP, DRINK WATER					
MY ENVIRON MENT	CLEAN, ORGANIZE, REARRANGE, DECORATE, SORT, CLEAN OUT/DONATE, GARDENING/YA RD WORK					
MY PEOPLE	SAY THANK YOU, DO A CHORE WITHOUT BEING ASKED, WRITE A LETTER TO SOMEONE, GIVE A COMPLIMENT, BE A HELPER, LISTEN, SHOW YOU CARE					

# Psychoeducation

- Healthy living in general- body, mind, environment, others
- Our thoughts impact our emotions and behavior
- Education about symptoms commonly seen in anxiety, depression etc





# Emotional Literacy













- Practice using feelings words
- Recognizing how their body feels when they are having a certain emotion
- Identifying feelings of others in movies, on tv, out in the community
- UNO, Candyland, JENGA

(Level 1)

## Emotional Check-In

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Today, I am feeling:**













					
Calm	Happy	Excited	Confused	Nervous	Afraid
					
Disappointed	Hurt	Sad	Bored	Upset	Angry


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## Emotional Check-Out

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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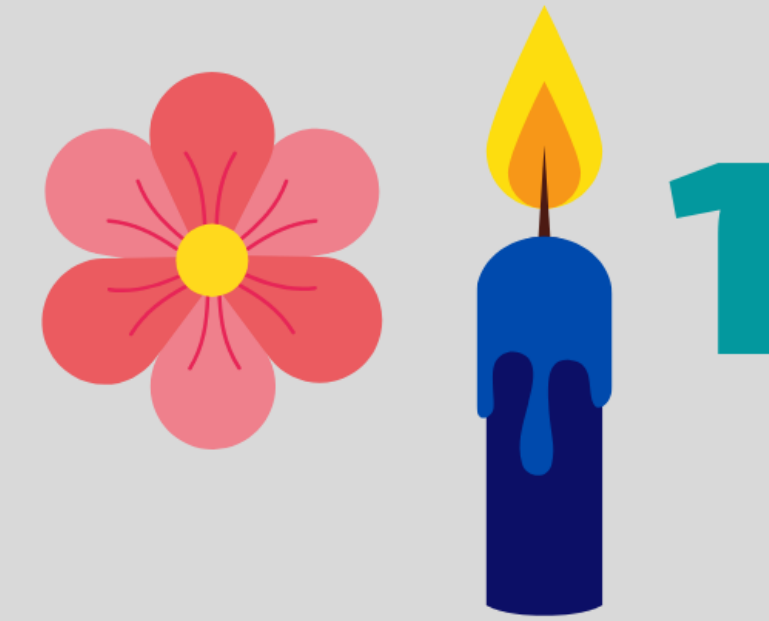
# Coping Skills

- Deep breathing- flower/candle
- Muscle relaxation- stress ball
- Grounding
- Gratitude Practice
- Journaling- voice record or text into phone

\*Visual aids & YouTube videos

\*Practice when not upset, make a part of routine

## CALM DOWN TIME



BREATHE IN THROUGH YOUR NOSE AND OUT THROUGH YOUR MOUTH 5 TIMES.



LOOK AROUND YOUR ROOM AND SAY OUT LOUD, 5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE.



LISTEN TO OR SING YOUR FAVORITE HAPPY SONG.



GIVE YOURSELF A BIG HUG AND SQUEEZE FOR 5 SECONDS.



*No Limits Counseling*  
HEALTHY IN MIND.  
EMPOWERED WITH INDEPENDENCE.





# Relationships, Boundaries & Sexuality Education-



Isolation= assist in connecting with community

Few meaningful relationships= help to develop friendship skills

Misunderstanding boundaries with coworkers and peers= Circles Training and role play for different people in their lives

Desire to have a sweetheart= talk to them about how relationships develop...everything from having a crush, flirting, dating, healthy vs unhealthy behaviors, communication, breaking up

Internet safety= only converse with friends and family you know in real life that you have met face to face

Increased risk of sexual abuse= consent, appropriate names for private parts, the right to say no, sexual acts, safety plan





# Community Connection... specifically, the disability community.





## Relationships, Boundaries & Sex Ed

- Adult Down Syndrome Center (videos and visual aid resource library)
- [amaze.org](http://amaze.org)
- PEERS Program (role play videos)
- Planet Puberty Website
- Terri Couwenhoven books
- National Council on Independent Living- sex ed videos



## Mental Health

- Adult Down Syndrome Center (videos and visual aid resource library)
- Mental Wellness in Adults with Down Syndrome, 2nd edition- Dr. Chicoine & Dr. McGuire
- DSCBA Mental Health Padlet
- [downsyndromebraintrain.com](http://downsyndromebraintrain.com)
- YouTube- mindfulness videos



# Thank you! Please reach out with any questions!

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