

Tell
about Me!

Mia Rodriguez

My guide to learning with
that extra something special

Saints Peter and Paul
Kindergarten 2014



Hello! Nice to meet you!

My name is *Mia Rodriguez*
and I am 5 years-old.

When I was growing in my
mom's tummy, I was given
something "extra" *special*.
You see, most people have
23 pairs of chromosomes,
numbered from one to 23;
but I was born with an
"extra" one in pair number
21. I was born with
Down syndrome.

I am not a "Down's girl", like some people say;
nor am I Down syndrome.

I am just a girl... who happens to have Down syndrome.



This special genetic make-up affects different aspects of my development. The extra chromosome gave me a lower muscle tone than most people, so when I was a baby, it took me a little longer to sit, crawl and walk.

But I am very persistent, so I always practice a new skill a lot until I can master it!



The good thing is that because I was not as busy as other babies, I was able to learn to read much faster.

By the time I was 18 months, I was already sight reading over 50 words.



When I was three-years old, I was already reading books like *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss all by myself!

And I love books! So, sometimes, I can get lost in a book, and I need prompts to put the books away so I can go play or do other things.

Down syndrome is not a disease. It is chromosomal arrangement that happened when I was conceived by my parents. Children with Down syndrome sometimes share similar characteristics; but we all look like our parents and our siblings, just like everyone else does.



*This is me at
10 months*



*This is my sister,
Emma, at 10 months*



*This is my brother,
Julian, at 10 months*



The three of us in August 2014



I have a great auditory memory, I can hear a name of a person, and will learn it and remember it immediately.

If I am also given a visual element, I learn even faster. So, I do know all my letters, upper and lower case, and their sounds. I even started spelling by sound.

Because of my lower muscle tone, my fine motor skills are not as mature as other children my age. So even though my handwriting has improved, this is still a hard skill for me. My parents have to remind me to sit properly and they provide me with a good chair with back and leg support. They also remind me to focus, write my letters slow, small and closer together.

It's just like anything else, practice makes perfection!! So, it will take a lot of practice for me to master this skill.





My occupational therapist told me that a strong and steady trunk provides the base of support needed for delicate fine motor tasks like writing, fastening buttons or snaps. I still have difficulty with those things, as well as with cutting with scissors, especially because I am a left-handed, and it is hard to find good scissors for me.

My mom reminds me to hold the paper with the “helping” hand, while I cut with the left hand. Sometimes I do a better job of cutting with scissors while standing because it gives me better support. It all goes back to good posture, and trunk control.

The low muscle tone also affects the way I walk. I wear orthotic inserts inside my shoes to give better support to my flat feet. It takes my body more energy than another child to walk or run... that's why you may notice that I walk or run slower.

Please don't think that I'm lazy, I will make the same distance, but at my own pace.



Just like any other kid, I have many interests.



I love swimming



I love horseback riding



I love tap dance and ballet

And all these activities help my body get stronger.

I love music! I enjoy singing and performing in front of people. And I love playing the piano too! I have been taking piano lessons for almost a year. Maybe you can come to my next piano concert.

Oh, and did I mention that I'm also learning to speak Spanish!





Here I am with my younger sister, Emma, meeting Elsa from Frozen. I wanted to sing *Let It Go* to her because I know all the words. I have very good memory so I can memorize a lot of songs.

Sometimes you may think that I am ignoring you, or that I am being defiant because I don't follow your instructions immediately. You see, I have days when it may take me a little longer than other kids to process the information.


I ask for your patience, because I do hear and understand you.

Gestural, verbal or partial physical prompts and positive reinforcement always help me. Just give me a few more seconds to process what you said.

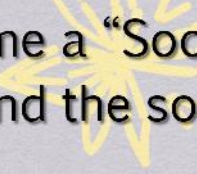


When there is a lot of background noise, sometimes it takes more time for me to filter through, and it makes it difficult to pay attention. So, just make sure that I am looking at you when you talk to me.







Just like other kids, I also thrive on structure and predictability. I can learn to master everyday tasks, if I have a predictable routine. When there is a new situation coming up, my parents talk to me and describe as much as possible what that new experience will be.



Sometimes, my mom shows me a “Social Story” with pictures to describe a new situation and the social cues that can prepare me.



Again, like other kids, I also learn best when there is good structure in place, and boundaries and expectations are explained to me.



If I tell you “I’ll do it by myself” it is because sometimes I like to have control of things. But if I get frustrated trying to “do it by myself,” give me a few seconds, and then you can help me.

At home, I always ask for help when I need it, or say I don’t know when I don’t know the answer; but in a bigger group, I may feel pressure and I may forget to ask for help, or I may be timid at first until I feel comfortable in the group.





Sometimes I need my quiet time, and to be by myself. I think everyone needs quiet and alone time sometimes too!

But I am happy and learn more, when I am next to my friends and peer models, enjoying the same things they do.

I may move slower, because it takes me a little longer to walk or run at the speed of my friends. But I love when my friends are helpful and understand that I take an extra few seconds to do what they do.



Here I am with my sister, Emma and friends Morgan, Kendal and Jordan

I have a very big family, who love and support me. I have family in Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, California, Costa Rica and even in China!



This is mom, Dad and sister and brother at my preschool graduation



This is my grandmother who lives in Costa Rica, and my cousins. My youngest cousin lives in China!



This is me with my cousin Ava at the Zoo in Philly



This is me with my grandmother,, aunts, uncles and all my cousins from Florida



This is me running the Dub C race in West Chester with my sister, my DAD and my uncle Jeff.

I am always up for a good challenge, so don't be afraid to challenge me! I am very capable, but sometimes I need extra time and patience from you.

I love being an important member of the team, and I love responsibilities. Sometimes I can be the first in line, or sometimes I can be in charge of turning off the lights. Give me a responsibility or specific task and I will accomplish it with lots of enthusiasm.

I like to pray with my friends and teachers and I am excited about learning more about Jesus and my Catholic faith.

So, I hope you have learned a little bit more about me, and that you can open the doors to everything that is possible for me to do.

This is going to be a very exciting year for me, and I hope for you too!





Designed with love by Mia's mom, Natalie Saenz. Please feel free to call me with any questions you may have about Mia, or about Down syndrome in general.
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