Welcome
You have had a baby. A beautiful child, to you it is the most beautiful child in the world. Congratulations on the birth of your child.

Your child has Down’s Syndrome. Some parents knew during pregnancy, but most find out shortly after birth. Sometimes parents feel guilty that their child has Down's Syndrome. There is no need. It could happen to anyone.

You love your child. Naturally. You are happy with your child. However, if you have just found out that your child has Down's Syndrome, you often experience other emotions. Uncertainty, anxiety, sadness, anger, guilt, shame. Accept those emotions. Other parents have experienced the same. It will pass.

You may not even have realised that you had aspirations for your child. You now need to modify those. The future seems uncertain. You have many questions. How independent can your child become? Will it be happy? Will it learn to speak? Can you offer your child what it needs?

Uncertainty, confusing emotions and many questions. Your life may look like this now, but it will pass. You will have new aspirations for your child. Your child needs you. It is welcome. There is a great deal you can do for your child.

Ordinary and special
But what does your child need in order to develop? Naturally: care and attention. That is no different from children that do not have Down's Syndrome. So do what you would for any baby or toddler. That in itself assists your child greatly.

Do the usual things. However, because your child has Down's Syndrome, extra care is necessary. There is a greater risk of a number of medical conditions. It is important that this is closely monitored and that these are treated. Therefore, various hospitals have Down’s Syndrome teams that can assist you. You can also receive support from child physiotherapists and logopedists. Physiotherapists provide advice on how to help your child in the development of motor skills, in learning to roll over, sit, crawl, stand and walk. Logopedists can provide advice on learning to eat and drink, and later in language development.

Children with Down's Syndrome have what is referred to as a learning difficulty. Therefore, they take longer and need more support to learn new things. As your child has learning difficulties, you will need to teach it new things in a more considered, more patient, and more focused way. An early intervention programme like Kleine Stapjes can assist you.

Kleine Stapjes
In Kleine Stapjes, children’s normal development is divided into very small sub-steps. Using a list of these sub-steps, you can determine your child’s current abilities precisely, and plan what it will learn in the coming period. The programme applies to five different development areas:

- Gross Motor Skills (learning to sit, crawl, walk, etc.)
- Fine Motor Skills (learning to use one’s hands)
- Receptive Language (understanding language)
- Expressive Language (communicating through gestures and words)
- Personal and Social Skills (self-sufficiency and social interaction)

For each step, the programme offers suggestions for teaching your child new skills.

In the first months, many of those steps are fairly obvious: they cover things that every parent does with a baby. The programme enables you to be more attuned to how your child’s development is progressing. It can be very rewarding. You become more aware of small things with which you can challenge your child somewhat more.

As the child gets older, there will be more steps in the programme that you may not have thought of yourself. Children with Down's Syndrome develop somewhat slower than other children.
Speech in particular, is often somewhat delayed. That is why it is not always obvious to parents of toddlers with Down's Syndrome how much their children can understand. Kleine Stapjes provides a clear guideline.

The benefits of Kleine Stapjes

Kleine Stapjes stimulates development. In addition, your child learns to concentrate on activities from an early age. The demands placed on the child are continually geared to the child’s abilities, therefore it is neither overwelmed, nor under-challenged. That prevents behavioural issues. These benefits mean that children with Down's Syndrome that have been supported by the Kleine Stapjes programme, are given a better start at school. These children therefore have a better chance of going into mainstream education. During school years, the results achieved on the Kleine Stapjes programme can be further developed. Kleine Stapjes is a good foundation for development of as much independence as possible later.

The investment you make in your very young child now, will reap rewards later in terms of greater independence. But, the Kleine Stapjes programme does more than provide benefits later. Many parents find that the programme enables them to look after their children so much better. They derive a great deal of pleasure from that. It is an awesome experience when you realise your child has truly mastered a new skill after a period of practice. You will experience that far more consciously through the programme.

For every child

Each child with Down's Syndrome is different. Some develop more quickly than others. Kleine Stapjes is there for all these children. The programme gives those children that develop relatively quickly that extra little bit of support. But Kleine Stapjes also benefits those children whose development is less successful, perhaps due to serious medical issues or additional limitations. Whether the child develops quickly or slowly, with Kleine Stapjes, you always know what your child's abilities are at that stage. That enables you to help it progress to the next step.

How much time does it require?

You care for your child and you play with your child. That is what all parents do. In that way, you support your child's development. Kleine Stapjes assists you during those times that you are interacting with your child anyway. That takes up no extra time. It does however require watchfulness and attention.

Naturally, you need some time to get to know the programme. You will need to ascertain which steps your child has mastered. You will need to read up about how you can best teach your child new steps. We estimate that you will need to spend a few hours every fortnight on planning your teaching programme. Fortunately, you can get support from professionals who have a great deal of experience in working with young children and who are very familiar with the programme.

Professional support with Kleine Stapjes

Parents play the most important role in the Kleine Stapjes programme. They spend the most time with their child. But, you do not need to do it alone as a parent. Through Kleine Stapjes, you can also give others, family, or child minders, clear guidance on how they can best support your child's development in everyday situations.

If you want to make use of Kleine Stapjes, you can get expert support. In practice, this means that approximately once every fortnight, some one comes to observe and advise you. Such an expert can help you effectively assess your child's abilities, and identify new challenges. The expert can provide advice on how you can integrate new learning steps into daily routines. The expert can assist you in devising even smaller subs-steps for your child if necessary.

Parents do not need to pay for that specialist support. The organisations that offer support will vary per region. For information on how to arrange support via Kleine Stapjes, please see our website: www.downsyndroom.nl/kleinestapjes.