

What are Social Stories?

Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray in 1991, and are written to help autistic people gain greater understanding of social situations, providing information, offering perspectives on other people's actions and explaining expectations.

Social Story Topics

Social Stories can cover a wide range of topics, including;

- **Self-help** e.g. dressing/undressing, using the toilet, brushing teeth
- **Behavioural** e.g. managing anger, self-calming techniques and managing obsessions
- **Social Skills** e.g. turn-taking, waiting in line, asking for help, understanding others
- **Changes to routines** e.g. fire alarm, moving home, supply teacher
- **Supplying positive feedback** e.g. celebrating success and highlighting strengths and achievements in order to raise self-esteem and confidence

Writing a Social Story

Social Stories are typically very short stories written about a particular situation or event. The main points to consider are;

- Identify the purpose of the story and consider what social understanding may need to be addressed in order to attain the story objective (if a story is being written around washing hands, highlight the importance of keeping hands clean)
- Collate as much information as possible regarding the objective of the story (when does the situation occur, when does it start and finish, who is involved, what happens in the situation etc)
- Collate information about the individual that the story is being written for (age, level and ability and understanding, key words that they will respond positively to or words that may cause anxiety and need to be omitted, level of attention, particular interests/motivators etc)

There are Four basic sentence types;

- **Descriptive** – accurate and truthful, provides answers to **wh** questions (I learn lots of things in school... I have to sleep each night so that I have energy for the next day.)
- **Perspective** – describes other people's feelings and thoughts (My Mum will be pleased if I eat my dinner... My teacher is happy when I sit on the carpet for register etc)
- **Directive / Coaching** – provides desired responses and allows for flexibility (I can try..., I might like... etc)

- **Affirmative** – supports information in previous sentences, emphasises an important message and enhances a commonly shared opinion or value (This is a good idea... This is ok etc)

The basic sentence ratio;

- 0-1 directive sentences
- 2-5 descriptive, perspective and affirmative sentences

When writing the story;

- Include an introduction, main body and conclusion
- Keep the story as accurate and factual as possible
- Write with clear, *positive* language
- Ensure the content and presentation is suited to the individual's age and level of understanding. Consider the use of symbols or photos alongside the text, particularly for younger children
- Use 'I will try' rather than 'I will' in the directive/coaching sentences

Using the Story

Stories should be read 1:1 with the child regularly and ideally in advance of the situation they are about. They are not meant to be read 'in the moment' when the situation has happened or as a consequence. Ideally the child will be able to remember, or be reminded to recall, the story when the situation arises, and can use the coaching/directive sentence to better understand or adapt their response to something.

For older children, introduce the story as something that will help them understand social situations and learn how to take part appropriately. This, in turn, promotes their positive contribution and increases social acceptance. Once stories have been used successfully, they can become cumulative to include further targets. You could add sentences like..... 'Before, I used to find it difficult to... Now I can.' This story could then focus on a new target.

See www.carolgraysocialstories.com