

Social Stories

Most people are privy to a "secret code" which could be described as a system of "unspoken communication" that carries important information; this system that eludes and frustrates individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Asperger syndrome. This can result in a lack of social understanding, which affects the way an individual is able to use the social skills s/he acquires.

Social Stories were developed to assist individuals with ASD to develop greater social understanding.

A Social Story is a short description of a particular situation, event or activity, which includes specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. They can provide an individual with some idea of how others might respond in a particular situation and therefore provide a framework for appropriate behaviour.

This approach aims to improve the ability for the child to see things from another's perspective and helps integrate information into a more meaningful 'whole'.

Social Stories can be used in many different ways including:

- To develop self-care skills (e.g. how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed), social skills (e.g. sharing, asking for help, saying thank you, interrupting), and academic abilities.
- To assist an individual to cope with changes to routine, and unexpected or distressing events (e.g. absence of teacher, moving house, thunderstorms).
- To provide positive feedback to an individual regarding an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self-esteem.
- As a behavioral strategy (e.g. what to do when angry, how to cope with obsessions).

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Guidelines for writing Social Stories

Stories should be individualised to take into account:

- Age
- Reading and comprehension ability
- Attention span
- Interests
- Preferred learning style

How to Write Social Stories

The most important thing to remember is you want your story to be positive.

1. Picture the Goal

Think about purpose of the Social Story and the social understandings necessary to encourage the desired behaviours, or responses, from the individual.

e.g. Our goal may be to teach a child to cover his mouth when coughing. To achieve this goal, the child needs to understand why covering his mouth when coughing is important (i.e. it stops germs from being spread which may make other people sick).

2. Gather information

The 'Social Story Worksheet' will help with this.

3. Consider the Sentence Types

There are several types of sentences that are very helpful to include.

In general, your story should have mostly descriptive, perspective and affirmative sentences and maybe 1 or 2 directives.

Use the 'social story' ratio (0 - 1 directive or control sentence = 2 - 5 descriptive and/or perspective sentences descriptive sentences).

The basic rule is more descriptive sentences than directive.

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Descriptive sentences

These are truthful, opinion-free statements of the facts. They define the situation, describe the events, and introduce characters and roles.

Descriptive sentences answers the **wh** questions:

- Where it occurs
- Who is involved
- What they are doing
- Why they are doing it

e.g. **Most children go to school.**

Christmas Day is December 25.

Perspective Sentences

Perspective sentences describe the thoughts, feelings or mood of **OTHER** people. You normally would not write about what the individual is thinking because you don't really know—unless of course, the child tells you.

e.g. **My teacher knows a lot about maths.**

Lots of children like chocolate.

Directive Sentences

Directive Sentences give a suggested response or a choice of responses to a situation. With a directive sentence you are gently directing the child's behaviour. **These sentences are always stated positively.**

e.g. **I will try to cover my mouth when I cough.**

I might like to play outside during lunchtime.

Directive sentences often begin with "**I can try,**" "**I will work on**" and "One thing I can do is....."

Be careful here because if you say "I will." you may make the child think he must respond in a certain way—that there's no other option. Children with ASDs can be very literal so you need to include some flexibility in your statements. This is also relevant to descriptive sentences, for example be wary of using "all" and use phrases like "most" or "some".

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Affirmative Sentences

Affirmative sentences often stress an important point or refer to a rule. They reflect values or opinions of people in general, NOT specific people. You can use them to reassure a child:

e.g. **The toilet makes a loud noise when it flushes. This is okay.**

I will try to hold an adults hand when crossing the road. This is very important

Top Ten Tips

1. Use the Social Story Worksheet. This helps you to clearly identify your goal or target behaviour and helps you to establish what information or decisions you need to make before writing the story.

2. Be sure your Social Story has an introduction, body and conclusion. Give the social story a title and teach to this title.

Start out with general sentences such as "Most people eat dinner." End with your reinforcer and feelings sentences such as "When I eat my dinner I will probably get ice cream for pudding. This makes me happy."

3. Keep it positive! Use extreme caution with directive sentences. Positively state desired behaviours. Avoid statements using 'no' and 'I won't.' Instead use "I will try." and focus on the desired behaviour.

e.g. for no hitting use "I will try to keep my hands to myself."

4. Write at or below a child's reading comprehension level. Keep the story and statements short and to the point.

5. Provide assistance recognizing and interpreting social cues, describe who, what, when, when it's over, why and where.

Consider using "wh-"questions as titles. It is important to select a title which accurately reflects the overall meaning of the story

6. Illustrations can help. Make sure they are really clear though!! For example avoid photographs with lots of irrelevant detail.

Here is a good example:

Washing my hands

People usually wash their hands using soap and water. There are five

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steps I will try to follow when washing my hands. An adult can help me learn these steps.

7. Change abstract concepts so they are easily understood. Always try to describe a desired behaviour stating EXACTLY what you mean.

i.e. "sit nicely"— what does 'nicely' actually mean? For example, "I will try to sit on the chair, keep my feet on the floor" etc.

8. Write from a first person perspective as though the child is describing the event.

9. Write in reality. Mention variations in routine. Ensure a story is accurate if interpreted literally. Use terms like 'sometimes' and 'usually.'

For example, "Art is usually on Tuesdays at about 2:00." Be careful of phrases like "I will behave in church." It is guaranteed *the child will behave*. Exactly how they will behave is what you are concerned about. Offer specific information such as "I will try to sit quietly in church."

10. A social story may use alternative vocabulary to maintain its relaxed and positive quality. For example

different becomes another

change becomes replace

new becomes better

How to introduce the story

- Do it in a patient, relaxed way
- Do not share a story when either you or the child is upset OR when the situation is occurring.
- A social story is **not** to be used as a punishment for misbehaviour
- Pick a place where there are few distractions and say in a straightforward way, "I wrote this story for you." OR "I have a story about _____. Let's read it together now
- Read the story sitting beside and slightly in back of the child. You want joint attention on the story—not on your face or gestures.
- Read it through once or twice.
- Share the story with other people who are important in the

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story

- Share it with others one at a time. This shows the child that others now have the same information and it encourages generalization. This also helps other people know what to do. Most stories are reviewed once a day and maybe right before the target situation.
- The topic of the story will probably dictate your review schedule. e.g. a story about a holiday is reviewed daily for a few weeks before the holiday.
- A story about a social skill that is used in a variety of situations maybe reviewed 1x day.
- Introduce stories 1 at a time so you can focus on a 1 skill. Don't overwhelm them.
- After introducing the story watch the child's behaviour in the situation and see if you need to make any changes to your story.

Fading the Story

1. Rewrite it: selected sentences can be rewritten or omitted. Once the child seems confident with a new skill, you may omit directives OR rewrite them as partial sentences like: "When I get mad I can try to _____."

Caution: rewriting a story changes it! This may be upsetting for the child.

2. Another way to fade a story is to leave more time between readings.

If the story consistently gets a refusal:

Check your story—it may not be positive enough. A child can become defensive if attention is always focused on a difficult area. So, be sure to do positive, affirmative stories too.

Example:- When the fire alarm goes off

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Sometimes at school the fire alarm goes off in my school. (descriptive)

The fire alarm is a loud bell that rings when there is a real fire or when everyone in school is practicing getting out of the building. (descriptive)

When the bell goes off, the teachers, janitor and head teacher all help the children to line up and go outside quickly. (descriptive)

The fire alarm is loud so that everyone can hear it. (descriptive)

Sometimes I think it is too loud. (perspective)

The fire alarm does not bother all people. (perspective)

The teachers, janitors and principal may not understand how much the fire alarm bothers me. (perspective)

Sometimes they ask me to move quickly if I do not want to move quickly or get confused. (perspective)

Their job is to get me outside quickly so I am safe. (perspective)

It's ok to think the alarm is loud (affirmative) but it's important (affirmative) to stay calm and try to walk calmly and quickly with the other boys and girls (directive).

I will try to stay calm when the fire alarm rings (directive)

I will try to listen carefully to my teacher's instructions and follow the other children outside in a line (directive). This is very important (affirmative)

My teacher will be happy that I have stayed calm and followed her instructions. (perspective)

This will keep me safe.

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Example:- Helping the Teacher

It is the teacher's job to tell children what to do. It is the children's job to follow the teacher's instructions (descriptive). Children do not tell other children what to do unless this has been agreed (descriptive).

It is good to listen to the teacher and to do what the teacher asks me to do (affirmative).

Sometimes some children may forget that they have to listen to the teacher and do what is asked (perspective). This can be annoying. It is the teacher's job to remind these children to do what she has asked (descriptive).

When other children are not following the teacher's instructions, I can help her by sitting quietly (directive). This is a good idea as it lets the teacher remind the children what they need to do (affirmative).

Example:- Doing my Work

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My name is J K. I go to X Primary School. I am good at doing my work in class and I try hard. I like to get things right (descriptive) which is good (affirmative).

When children are doing new work and learning new things, they sometimes find the work hard and don't know what to do (perspective). When this happens to me I can ask someone to help me (directive). I can ask my teacher or another adult who is in the room to help me or I can ask another boy or girl. When I am stuck, I will put up my hand or go to the teacher and say: 'Please can you help me?' or 'This is hard, please can you help?' (directive) My teacher will be very pleased when I ask for help (affirmative).

When boys and girls are working in class they are learning and practicing new things (descriptive). When children are learning, they often make mistakes. Teachers do not mind when boys and girls make mistakes (perspective). Making mistakes is part of learning. Teachers are pleased to see that children are working hard, trying to do their work, and making mistakes (perspective). I will try to remember that it is OK to make mistakes (directive) as they show that I am working hard (perspective). It is also OK to hand in work with mistakes on it (affirmative). If I get upset when I make a mistake, I will scribble on my scribble pad and not spoil the rest of my work (directive).

My teacher likes to see me working and to see my work when I have done it. She knows that I am a good worker in class (perspective).

Example:- Getting ready for school

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My name is James



I am 8 years old.

I don't like getting up to go to school, but on some days I can get up and get ready just as my mum really likes me to do.



So first of all when mum wakes me up I get straight up.

Then I go downstairs and have my breakfast.



I sit at the table and put the cereal into my bowl and add the milk and sugar and then I eat it all up.



I also drink my juice.



Then I go upstairs again and get washed.



I brush my teeth.



And comb my hair.



Then I get dressed.

I then go downstairs and find my shoes and put them on



Then I put on my coat,



And pick up my bag



I then wait by the door until mum or dad open it.

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Then I go straight to the car and wait till mum or dad open the car and then I get straight in and put on my seat belt.



When we get to school I go straight into the playground without any fuss.



When the bell goes I give mum a kiss and go and line up with my



I then go into my classroom and see my friends and teacher.

My mum and dad are really proud of me



Web and Book Resources

www.child-autism-parent-cafe.com/how-to-write-a-social-story.html

www.thegraycenter.org

Social stories and comic strip conversations

<http://www.nas.org.uk/nas/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1574>

www.spdsupport.org.uk/socialstories.html

Social Stories Gray, C. (1995). Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations: Unique Methods to Improve Social Understanding.

Comic Strip Conversations

