

**Equity,
Excellence &
Empowerment
through
Psychology**

**SOUTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
SERVICE
SOCIAL STORIES:
A GUIDE FOR SCHOOLS
2020**

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What are Social Stories?

Social stories are a concept devised by Carol Gray in 1991 to improve the understanding of social situations, rules and expectations for people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

Social stories are a narrative used by teachers, parents, social workers or educational psychologists which include a short description of a particular situation, event or activity, and specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

Social stories are presented in a literal and concise way and are typically supported with visual presentations. Each story deals with only one situation, context or behaviour e.g. at school, home, playing, shopping or at a friend's house. Any situation involving social etiquette or rules which may not be immediately obvious to a child or young person can be explained using a social story.

Although social stories were initially developed for use with children with ASD, social stories have proved useful for supporting children with social and communication difficulties, as well as typically developing children.

Each story is written to meet an individual need and can be used from pre-school through to adulthood. Depending on the age, stage and cognition of the individual, the presentation of social stories can be adapted using photos, pictures or symbols, and can range from simple to more complex stories.



Why use Social Stories?

- Social stories help explain situations that children with ASD or social and communication difficulties might find difficult.
- Social stories provide children and young people with very specific facts or information that they may not be aware of, in order to help them understand and cope in an appropriate way. For example, they can help teach self-care skills (e.g. getting dressed and washing hands) and social skills (e.g. turn-taking, sharing and asking for help).
- Social stories provide information to help prepare a child for changes in their routine or for new or difficult social situations e.g. moving to a new house, absence of teacher, going to the dentist.
- Social stories provide structure to children and young people with difficulties in sequencing and executive functioning thereby reducing anxiety.
- Social stories can help someone to understand how others might behave or respond in a particular situation and can help others understand the perspective of an autistic person and why they may respond or behave in a particular way.
- Social stories can be used to support and encourage preferred appropriate behaviour, for example, what to do when angry or how to cope with obsessions. They can also be used to highlight positive behaviour and praise a child. Social stories are always written in a positive way even when they are addressing a difficult issue.



How can Social Stories be used?

To describe a wide range of social situations, teaching the child relevant social cues and or an appropriate response for that situation in what is a non-threatening format.

To personalise and emphasise appropriate social skills.

To teach routine as well as help children and young people to accommodate changes in routine or “forgetting”.

To teach academic material against a realistic, social backdrop – assisting students in relating and generalising learned skills to real situations.

To provide positive feedback to a child or young person about an area of strength or achievement in order to develop their self-esteem

To address a wide variety of behaviours, including aggression, fear and obsessions and compulsions.

To translate goals and targets (possibly written by pupils) into understandable steps

To explain the “fictional” qualities of commercial stories / movies etc., identifying realistically appropriate from inappropriate interactions depicted in those stories.

Guidance on Writing a Social Story

1. Picture the Goal

- Consider the purpose of the story and what the child needs to understand to achieve this goal.
- What do you want the end result to be? (The learning intention)

2. Gather the Information

- What is the situation you want to describe? For example, where does it occur? Who is involved? What will happen and why?
- Consider how the situation begins and ends.
- Think about the situation or problem from the child's perspective.

3. Tailor the Text

- Social Stories should have an introduction, body and conclusion.
- The title of a social story is very important as it can state the aim of the story or highlight the key issue.
- The language should be simple, clear and concrete. Avoid using abstract concepts.
- The language should be patient and supportive i.e. describing the desired outcome. NOT what should not be done. Avoid using language like "I will" and instead use "I might", or "I will try to".
- Stories can be written in first or third person, however first language is most accessible for younger children.

- Make positive statements only. Do not mention negative or naughty behaviour even if this is the point of story, instead focus on the desired outcome e.g. “If I feel angry, I will go into the quiet area to breathe and calm down”.
- Use words like “usually”, “Sometimes”, “It is okay if”, this helps to avoid black and white, rigid expressions that are hard for children and young people with ASD to accept if it does not happen.
- Presenting different elements of conversation with visuals can make aspects of social communication more concrete and therefore easier for children and young people to follow and understand.

Types of Sentences

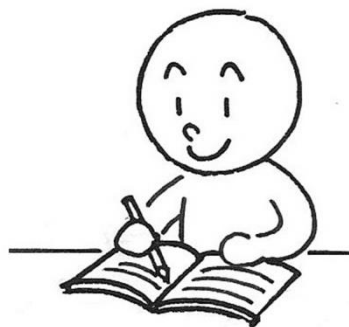
Social stories use 3 types of sentences: descriptive / perspective / directive:

- **Descriptive** sentences will be factual statements about Who? Where? What? Why? How? For example, “Sometimes I get sick”.
- **Perspective** sentences describe other people’s thoughts beliefs, opinions feelings and motivation about the event or the child or young person’s behaviour. Understanding other perspectives is difficult for children and young people with ASD due to difficulties with theory of mind (the ability to interpret others' beliefs, intentions and emotions).
- **Directive** sentences describe the expected response to a situation and gently direct the child towards this. For example, “I will try to cover my mouth when I cough”.

The basic story ratio as developed by Carol Gray is to include between 2 and 5 descriptive and/or perspective sentences and up to 2 directive sentences.

4. Other Key Points:

- Reread the story to see if it makes sense from the child or young person's perspective or get them to help create it.
- Generic stories can be found online or created as a framework for general use in schools. These are helpful as many situations that children and young people struggle with have common themes, including: change of routine, eating together, playing well, being kind, brushing teeth, going to the toilet etc.
- However, the best stories are bespoke and tackle very specific target behaviour for each individual.
- A bank or book of relevant stories can then be built up for individuals to refer back to if required.
- Stories can be very creative in terms of how they look, especially for younger children.
- Social stories can be recorded for the child to listen to or read together with an adult.



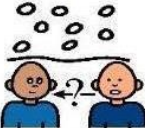
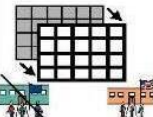


How to use Social Stories effectively

- Introduce the story when everyone is calm and relaxed. A quiet, distraction free environment is best.
- Ideally introduce the story in advance of the target situation.
- Maintain a positive, reassuring and patient attitude when reviewing the story with the child.
- Introduce one story at a time to maximise learning and ensure the individual does not become overwhelmed with information.
- The story should be reviewed frequently at home and at school.
- Review how well the story is received and whether it is working as intended.
- Stories are not designed to address all behavioural needs and should always be used as part of a comprehensive support plan.



Examples of Social Stories

<p>Most of the time I go to school on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.</p> <p>Sometimes the schedule changes, and I don't go to school.</p>	<p>school</p> 
<p>Sometimes there are holidays or special days off.</p> <p>Sometimes there are snow days.</p> <p>There is no school on snow days.</p>	<p>no school</p> 
<p>Sometimes when there is a lot of snow, there is no school, and I will know the night before.</p> <p>Sometimes I find out there is a snow day in the morning.</p> <p>Sometimes there is a lot of snow, but I will go to school.</p>	<p>Is there school?</p> 
<p>I can ask my parents if there is school.</p> <p>My parents will tell me if it is a school day or a snow day.</p> <p>A snow day is a change in schedule, but that is okay.</p>	<p>change in schedule</p> 

1. This story explains if and what happens when it snows. This helps to prepare the child or young person for changes in their usual routine.

Playing



Sometimes I like to play with other kids.



I can ask them, "Do you want to play with me?"



If they say "yes", I can play with them. I will have fun.



If they say "no", it's ok.













I can ask someone else or play by myself.

Tacey Beryl, 2009






2. This story addresses relevant social cues and appropriate responses to playing with others.

3. This story is from the National Autistic Society and helps to teach children and young people how to 'stay healthy' and the appropriate actions they should follow.

 I can  wash my hands  after  I  use the toilet.

 I can  wash my hands  before  I  eat.

 I can  wash my hands  after  I  cough  or sneeze.

 I can  make  sure  I  cover my mouth when I cough.

 I can  make  sure  I  put  tissues  into  the bin  after  wiping my nose.



COVID-19

A new illness called Coronavirus

There is a new illness called Coronavirus and this is a story about it.

What is the Coronavirus?

COVID-19

The coronavirus is a virus that is spreading fast across the world. Viruses are small. You can only see them with an electron microscope. This means we can't see the virus.



Lots of people around the world are getting ill with coronavirus and this is called a pandemic. A pandemic means that lots of people in a large area are sick. A pandemic is usually caused by a new virus.

What is the world doing about this pandemic?



Lots of people are working hard to learn more about this virus and to try to stop it.

In the meantime, people are being very sensible to stay safe.



We should wash our hands lots. We should try to not touch other people. We should cancel any trips or holidays and keep away from crowds.

If we are ill, we have to stay at home.

Let's talk Makaton

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4. This social story tackles a specific issue, coronavirus.

It also uses Makaton, to support children and young people who might normally communicate in this way.

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