

SOCIAL STORIES

What is a Social Story?

A social story is a short story that describes to an individual the relevant social cues and common responses in a specific situation. It explains what happens and why the situation occurs. A social story is designed to prepare an individual for an uncertain event, to share information, or to provide him/her with a strategy to deal with an event effectively with a thought-out plan and guide.

The social story should be based on the individual's specific needs that relate to a particular concern. Social stories can help individuals to cope with numerous things such as new situations, transitions and changes in daily routines, social interactions, academic tasks, and any situation that may cause anxiety or be unclear.

Carol Gray, a consultant to students with autistic spectrum disorders, developed a social stories program for individuals with autism that are also appropriate for individuals with other disabilities and needs. Individuals from preschool through adulthood can use social stories. She offers extensive and detailed information for those interested in implementing various components of the Social Stories Unlimited Approach (TM) that is available for purchase.

Goals of Social Stories

Based on identified needs, a social story may:

- Be part of a behavior, social skills, or communication program
- Translate a goal into understandable steps
- Facilitate social interactions
- Include the individual in more activities within social settings by facilitating independence and related skills

Using a Social Story

- 1) Select a behavior that would increase a positive social interaction for the individual and break it down into sequential steps
- 2) Define the target behavior concisely
- 3) Collect data about the target behavior before, during, and after using a social story as an intervention
- 4) Help the individual to generalize the story across situations through different activities and experiences
- 5) Gradually fade out the use of the story

Components of Social Stories

Social Stories are comprised of four types of sentences:

1.) Descriptive Sentences: Describe where a situation occurs, who is involved, what the individuals are doing, and why. They are used to describe a social setting or to provide sequential steps for completing an activity.

2.) Perspective Sentences: Describe how others feel and react within a given situation. They are designed to reflect others' perspectives.

3.) Directive Sentences: Describe the responses and actions the person should ideally make in a given situation. The desired behavior is defined in positive terms. The sentences often begin with "I can try to..." "I will work on..." or "I will try....."

4.) Control Sentences: Describe strategies the individual will use to remember social story's information. The individual typically writes them and thus may be eliminated for lower functioning students or individuals with stimulus overselectivity

*Sentence information adapted from
<http://members.spree.com/autism/socialstories.htm>

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Characteristics of Effective Social Stories

- Written in first person
- Describe a present or future social situation
- Use vocabulary, illustrations, and print size that are appropriate for the individual
- Read with the individual several times and model the desired behavior
- Avoid terms like “always”
- Maintain a proportion of 2 to 5 descriptive sentences for every directive sentence in a story regardless of its length

Suggestions for Writing a Social Story

- Focus on the purpose of the story Name the people and characters involved in the story
- Describe the setting
- State what happens in the order that events occur
- Provide the reason(s) why things happen
- Provide the responses required in the situation
- Use a simple format with 1-3 sentences per page
- Add visuals to the story such as photographs and drawings

Comic Strip Conversations

A Comic Strip Conversation is “an interaction between two or more people that incorporates the use of simple symbols, stick figure drawings, and color. These drawings serve to illustrate an ongoing communication” (www.autism.net/html/gray.html)

Comic Strip Conversations were first used with children who had autism; yet, like social stories, they are also appropriate for individuals of any age and with other disorders and needs.

The conversations typically define the feelings and intentions of each speaker using colors. For example, teasing statements would be written in red. A set of 8 symbols are used to identify what the comic strip characters or people say and think and to also represent basic abstract conversational concepts such as interrupting. However, individuals can create their own symbol system.

Thus, whereas social stories describe social situations and are often created in response to the needs an individual may have for a specific situation, comic strips use symbols to represent conversation and interactions with others to demonstrate abstract concepts. Both are tools designed to enhance social understanding and skills.

*Adapted from www.autism.net/html/gray.html

For Further Information

Please visit one of the following websites:

www.autism.net