



# Social Stories Information Booklet



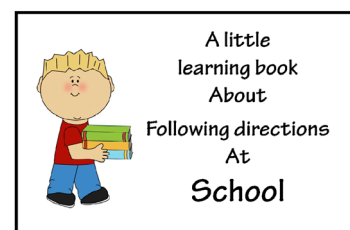
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## What is a social story?

Social stories were devised by Carol Gray. It is a text or story which describes a particular social situation. They provide children with a visual cue to reflect on and is made appropriate for the child. They were originally intended for children with autism and help them to understand a small part of their social world. Each story provides a child with clear, concise and accurate information about what is happening in a specific social situation, outlining both why it is happening and what sort of response might be.

Relevant social cues are included throughout the story. Social Stories sequence, explain and sometimes illustrate social rules or concepts. It is important to write the story at the child's functioning level and to make it motivating for the child. For instance, a story written about an upcoming field trip for a 4-year-old with autism would be markedly different than a story written for a 12-year-old with ASD. Social Stories are also used to help the child understand the perspective of others. The story can include what others are thinking and feeling, or explain the motives and actions of others. When writing a Social Story it is important to describe the desired response rather than the problem behaviour. For instance, if a child has a meltdown on a field trip, a Social Story written for subsequent field trips would not say, "It is important to not have a tantrum on field trips." The story would describe the sequence of events for the field trip, who would be going, how long the trip would last, etc.

Social Scripts, Social Stories™ (Gray, 2000) and the Power Card Strategy (Gagnon, 2001) are three types of social narratives that provide direct instruction of social situations for children on the autism spectrum, including those with Asperger Syndrome (AS). Each is written by a child's teacher or parent, sometimes with the help of the child, providing a visual cue and desired social responses. There are minimal guidelines for presenting social narratives, but the content should match the child's needs and take the child's perspective into consideration (Myles, Trautman & Schelvan, 2004). Each of these strategies can be used to teach routines, help a student deal with uncertainty, introduce change in routine, or address a wide variety of interfering behaviours, including aggression, fear and obsessions.



### How to write a social story.

First you need to identify the situation the child is having difficulties understanding the way to behave. Social stories are written for a variety of purposes based on the child's experiences or responses to events and situations in their world. These could include cues in the environment like fire drill, describing other people's points of view like how some people like loud music, explain new routines like changing classes. It could be used to give rules and expectations such as having a new teacher or it could be used to describe an upcoming event like a school trip.

The text of the social story is usually written in the first person from the child or student's point of view. It uses positive and reassuring language to answer the who, what, when, where and why of the situation and/or target behaviour. It states what the desired response is. Each story will have an introduction, body and conclusion. It is also written in the present tense.

There are three main types of sentences which are used when writing social stories. These are descriptive, perspective and directive sentences.

#### Descriptive sentences: -

- State the facts – e.g. My name is \_\_\_\_\_, the teacher is standing
- Include thought and feeling of the child or student and others in the story e.g. the teacher will like it when I listen or Many people want to learn.
- Identify what others can do to help the child or student if help is needed e.g. If I feel upset, my teacher can help by \_\_\_\_.
- Express a shared opinion or reassure the student e.g. this is ok.

#### Perspective sentences: -

Perspective sentences describe the internal states of other people. These type sentences provide information about thoughts, feelings, and/or mood of other people. Describing the internal stuff, many children with autism do not know about. For example:

- Many students like to eat their lunch with others.
- Everyone likes it best when each student only touches their own food.

#### Directive sentences: -

- Identify possible responses e.g. If I need a break, I can tell the teacher or put the break card on my desk and go to the beanbag.
- Gently direct behaviour e.g. I will try to \_\_\_\_.



The recommended formula for writing social stories based on Carol Gary's opinion is **two to five** *Descriptive* sentences for each *Directive* sentence, which may include *Perspective* sentences. Research shows that many stories which follow the ratio, do work. However, studies have not found any high numbers or shown that stories which did not follow the ratio do not work.

When writing a social story, you may like to get the child or student to help generate some of the content. Adding pictures may help to enhance the child or student's understanding of the story. It is important to tailor the story to the abilities and interest of the child or student and include what will likely happen if they correctly perform the target behaviour(s).

### **How to use a social story**

1. Find a quiet place with the least possible distractions.
2. Read the story to your child. Other rehearsal possibilities are: a) have your child read it out loud to you or others, and b) have others read it out loud to the person.
3. Develop a consistent time schedule to review the story. For example, daily before the situation occurs.
4. After the story is mastered, keep it visible and accessible for student reference.
5. Once a social story is part of a child's routine, continually monitor its effectiveness. If necessary, rewrite parts of story to improve your child's performance.

Following is an example of a Social Story written to prepare the child for a field trip.

On Wednesday, May 14, Mrs. A's class is going on a field trip to the science museum. The bus will arrive at 9:00 a.m. and the class will get on the bus. Each student will be assigned someone to sit with. I will sit with M. on the bus. Each student will bring a lunch from home. I will bring a peanut butter sandwich, an apple, two chocolate chip cookies and a juice box. My lunch will be in a paper bag so that I won't have to worry about losing my lunch box. My name will be on the paper bag and it will go into a cooler with all of the other lunches. It takes approximately 30 minutes on the bus to get to the museum. If there is lots of traffic or road construction, it may take longer. That is really okay because I always enjoy talking with M. on the bus. At the museum, M. and I will be with Mrs. A's group along with B, L and C. We will stay together as we walk through the museum. At 11:30 we will walk to the park to eat lunch. The cooler with all of the lunches will be there waiting for us. At 12:15 we will get back on the bus to return to school. It is going to be a great day because I know what to expect.

Social stories can be written for many situations. The following is an example of one about eating different kinds of foods.

My name is ... and I am in class ...

I like to eat some kinds of food but I don't like to eat some other foods. This is ok.

Other people like to eat some food and don't like other foods. This is ok too.

Different foods have different taste. I might like some and I might not like others.

It is a good idea to try different kinds of food.

My mum or my class teacher will tell me which food is good for me.

They will help me decide which food will help me grow and keep me healthy.

I must only eat food that is provided by my mum or my class teacher.

If I try different food then this will make my mum and my class teacher happy.



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## Social Scripts

Social Scripts provide pre-taught language for specific situations. They can involve conversation starters, responses and ideas to connect conversations or change the topic. Social Scripts can reduce the stress associated with social interactions and assist the child with understanding the perspective of others. Including informal language, slang or child-specific terms in the Social Script may help the conversational exchange appear more natural (Kamps et al., 2002).

Scripting is the practice of using focused scripts of typical situations and encounters to help teach students appropriate social skills and behaviours. Using scripts to role-play provides an organized plan for teaching particular social skills that include: -

- ❖ Thinking about one's behaviour before, during and after speaking.
- ❖ Using appropriate eye contact, voice, tone, expression and posture.
- ❖ Respecting someone's personal space.
- ❖ Learning to participate appropriately in groups
- ❖ Being assertive without being pushy
- ❖ Dealing with peer pressure
- ❖ Taking charge of one's feelings
- ❖ Giving and responding to criticism
- ❖ Disagreeing with others
- ❖ Settling conflicts
- ❖ Compromising and negotiating
- ❖ Dealing with failure or being left out.

Social scripts help teach children and students how to interact with peers and adults, manage their anxiety and address behaviours like aggression, fear and obsessions. Using social scripts is like practicing for a play but the play is real life. Sometimes, children may feel awkward at first as the words are scripted. With practice the children or students will become spontaneous and comfortable. The goal of scripting is to help students transfer the social skills learned using the scripts to other situations.

Social Scripts are not appropriate in every situation as there is a risk in making children sound too rehearsed or "scripted" in their response. Because students with autism spectrum disorders struggle with appropriate generalization of skills, they may try to use a script in a wrong situation. For example, Rick, a fifth-grader with high-functioning autism, learned how to order a cheeseburger and fries at a well-known fast food restaurant through scripted communication. When he ordered the same food at a sit-down restaurant, he became upset when asked additional questions about the order, such as "How do you want that cooked?" and "What type of cheese do you want on your burger?"

Following is an example of a Social Script written for Rick when ordering in a fast food restaurant.

When I go to a fast food restaurant I stand in line until it is my time to order. The person taking the order will say something like, "Hi, what would you like to order?" I will say, "I want a cheeseburger, a small order of fries and a small coke." If he asks me if I want anything else, I will say "No." I will then hand him a five pound note and will be given some change. I will say, "Thank you," when I get my food.

### **Writing a social script**

1. Write a sentence about the topic of social script. For younger children it helps if it is written in first person.

**Example:** My name is A and this is my story about doing chores.

2. Write a sentence defining or describing the topic of the story.

**Example:** Chores are things I do around the house to help the house stay clean and organised.

3. Write a sentence giving specific examples of what might be involved in the activity/event. (For some topics, this may require more than one sentence.)

**Example:** My mum and dad will write down the things I have to do so I can remember. Some chores that I will do are washing the dishes, making my bed and feeding the dog.

4. Write the sentence explaining what the expectations are for the child in this situation.

**Example:** I will need to try and do my chores every day. I can choose to do them in the morning or at night. If I forget to do them, mum and dad will remind me and I need to listen to them.

5. Write a sentence explaining what the child can do in the situation if they are feeling nervous, scared, overwhelmed, confused, mad, sad, etc.

**Example:** If I am confused about what to do, I can check my list or ask mum and dad for help.

6. Write a sentence describing the outcome/reward/end result of the situation.

**Example:** Mum and dad will be very happy if I do my chores every day. If I do my chores every day, I will get to choose a treat on Saturdays. I can do it!

Other reminders: -

- The story should answer all relevant "wh" questions
- The story should be developmentally appropriate (use appropriate language, length, details, etc.)
- Adding pictures with the words can support comprehension for younger children
- Write the story in a positive tone

- The story should help the child know what is coming and what to do
- Avoid using absolutely language such as: you will, you must, have to, etc.
- Try to use concrete but flexible language, such as you can, might, sometimes, etc.
- The exception to this rule may be with safety concepts such as “I have to stay inside when I am not with mum and dad.