

TOPIC:

Using Social Stories with Children with Autism

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Micro Training Course Developed

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INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:

*Read through this self-study

*Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire

*Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.

Children with autism experience difficulties with social interaction. They tend to face problems in seeing the perspective of another person. A common strategy for dealing with this is using *Social Stories* to help individuals on the autism spectrum to recognize and understand social situations.

What are Social Stories? *Social Stories* are a tool created by Carol Gray to explain appropriate social behaviors and provide answers to questions that a person on the autism spectrum may need to know in order to interact appropriately with others (for example, who, what, where, and why) in social situations. They are customized for the individual and can be delivered in a variety of ways: written or picture stories, comic strips, scripts, PowerPoint presentations or even videos.



How do Social Stories help? A Social Story is designed for the specific child and may include things the child values and is interested in. For example, if a child is interested in insects, you could include an insect as a character in a story about going to school. They provide personal scenarios for difficult situations and create a script for appropriate behavior. They also assist an individual in learning the perspectives of others and give concrete, detailed explanations about what the desired behavior is for social situations. They are designed to be positive and encouraging instead of just discouraging inappropriate

behavior. Social Stories can be written at the level of any child or young adult and can range from very simple to very complex stories. They can also assist the parent or caregiver in addressing sensitive or embarrassing topics with adolescents, (such as hygiene, menstruation, masturbation, appropriate touching, or dating) while keeping everyone's dignity intact.

Where can I get Social Stories and how do I write them? Social Stories can be purchased, downloaded or written yourself. The Social Story is much more than a few sentences and a picture. They are designed with a specific pattern that includes several descriptive and perspective sentences and a directive sentence. Once you learn the pattern, it is easy to customize stories you find or to write your own! First, decide what you want the story to be about. Figure out what skill or behavior needs to be taught. Some examples might be, to learn to interact in social situations, learn a new routine or activity, or how to appropriately respond to feelings like anger and frustration. Next, determine your child's level of understanding and the best format for them, and finally, write the story!

Social Stories consist of **three** specific kinds of sentences. The format looks like this:

Descriptive + Perspective + Directive

- ✚ Descriptive sentences describe what people do in particular social situations, and clearly define *where* a situation occurs, *who* is involved, *what* they are doing, and *why*. An example of a **descriptive sentence** is, "Sometimes at school, the fire alarm goes off. The fire alarm is a loud bell that rings when there is a real fire or when we are practicing getting out of the building. The teachers, janitors, and principal all help us to line up and go outside quickly. The fire alarm is loud so that everyone can hear it. Sometimes I think it is too loud."

✚ Perspective sentences present others' reactions to a situation so the individual can learn how others perceive various events. These describe the internal states of people, their thoughts, feelings, and mood. An example of a **perspective sentence** is, *"The fire alarm does not bother all people. The teachers, janitors, and principal may not understand how much the fire alarm bothers me. Sometimes they get mad if I do not move quickly or if I get confused. Their job is to get me outside quickly so I am safe in case there is a real fire."*

✚ Directive sentences direct a person to an appropriate desired response. They state, in positive terms, what the desired behavior is. It lets them know what they *should* do to be successful. They present or suggest a response or choice of responses to a situation or concept. Directive sentences often begin with "I can try ...", "I will try..." or "I will work on..." and gently direct the behavior of the child.

An example of a **directive sentence** is, "I will work on staying calm when the fire alarm rings."

For more information about Social Stories:

- carolgraysocialstories.com
- ACRF Self Study: Social Stories
- www.autism-help.org/communication-social-stories-autism.htm

You can also include a **control sentence** in your Social Story. A control sentence identifies strategies the person can use to facilitate memory and comprehension of the Social Story. They are usually added by the individual after reviewing the Social Story. A control sentence should be written or inspired by the child. An example of a control sentence is, *"When the fire alarm rings, I will think about insects following each other out of the forest to escape the burning fire."*

It is important to not have too many Directive and Control sentences. These sentences are optional in a Social Story. If they are used, Carol Gray recommends using them in the ratio of 0-1 Directive or Control sentences for every 2 -5 Descriptive and /or Perspective sentences.

EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL STORY: *Not listening*

It's important to look at people and stop what I'm doing when they have something to tell me. Sometimes grown-ups tell me very important things that I need to know. If I don't look and listen I might miss something important and make the grown-ups angry. I know it's wrong to keep doing what I'm doing when grown-ups want me to listen. I will stop and listen to grown-ups when they talk to me.

EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL STORY: *Interrupting*

I shouldn't interrupt when others are having a conversation or are busy with something. It's not polite. If it's extremely important, I can tap the person on the shoulder and say "excuse me". Otherwise, I must be patient and wait until they're finished. Interrupting makes people angry because you stop them from talking and they might forget what they were talking about. Everyone deserves to talk without being interrupted. Grown-ups like polite children. They're especially proud of children who do not interrupt. Sometimes I might think it's important and the grown-up will tell me it's not. If that happens, I can wait patiently.

How do I use Social Stories? If the individual with autism can read, the parent can introduce the story by reading it twice. The person then reads it once a day independently. When the individual with autism cannot read, the parent can read the story on a video or audio tape with cues to turn the page while the child "reads" along. The person listens and "reads" along with the story once a day. When the individual develops the skills displayed in the Social Story, the story can be faded by reducing the number of times the story is read each week, and then reviewing the story once a month or as needed.

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