

# Using a Social Story™ Tip Sheet



VANDERBILT KENNEDY CENTER

TREATMENT & RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

## What is a Social Story™?

Many people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other related disorders benefit from having a written guide for situations that may be new, scary, or confusing. A Social Story™ is a helpful way to provide that guide.

The goal of a Social Story™ is to help your child understand the situation and to help decrease anxiety that comes from entering an unknown situation. Social Stories™ can be used to describe other unfamiliar social situations or environments such as a birthday party, school field trip, having a substitute, etc. Social Stories™ give individuals social information through pictures and text instead of spoken word, which can be difficult for individuals with ASD.

Social Stories™ are part of a category of interventions known as story-based interventions or social narratives. They have had significant research showing the effectiveness of their use to be considered an established treatment for children with ASD. For more information about evidence-based treatments, go to The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders at <http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/>. Social Stories™ were created by Carol Gray; for more information visit, [www.thegraycenter.org](http://www.thegraycenter.org).

## How Can I Use It to Help Prepare my Child for Community Outings?

If knowing the details about an event ahead of time will relieve anxiety, have your child read the story a few days prior to the visit. By reviewing the story, it will help create predictability about a new or unknown social situation and environment. While reviewing the story with your child, you can answer other questions your child may have.

If reading the story ahead of time will make your child more anxious, wait until just before (for example, the morning of or in the car on the way) to give them the story. Have your child read the parts of the story that explains what is happening at each particular step during the visit.

## Tips for Writing a Social Story™

- Describe what is going to happen in the situation rather than directing your child on what they should do.
- Accurately describe the situation in detail. Focus on aspects of the situation your child may find difficult (for example, meeting new people, waiting in a waiting room, or certain lights and smells).
- Focus on important social cues, events that might occur, actions or reactions that might be expected, and why the event is occurring.
- Write from your child's perspective (for example, such as "I will be going to \_\_\_\_\_. I may..." or "John is going to \_\_\_\_\_. He may...").
- Uses positive, concrete language.
- Do not write in absolutes. For example, instead of writing "I will get a map that I will be able to use while visiting \_\_\_\_\_," write "I may get a map that I will be able to use while visiting \_\_\_\_\_".
- Some children may respond best to breaking down each task that will occur during the procedure in a detailed way. This may make other children more anxious and, for that child, a more general story might be better.