

Social Story™ Tip Sheet

Social Stories™ were developed by Carol Gray and are an effective method to provide guidance and directions for responding to various social situations. They describe social situations specific to individuals and circumstances while promoting self-awareness, self-calming, and self-management. Social stories are not meant to change behavior, rather, they are meant to clarify social expectations.

Writing a Social Story™

1. **Identify** a situation in which the student is having difficulty understanding or exhibiting appropriate behavior. Social Stories™ are written for a variety of purposes based on a student's experiences or responses to events and situation in his/her world. Some common topics include responding to cues in the environment (e.g., fire drills), describing other people's points of view (e.g., some people like loud music), defining new routines (e.g., changing classes), outlining rules and expectations (e.g., having a substitute teacher), or describing an upcoming event (e.g., field trips, school programs).
2. **Write** the text of the story. Social Stories™ are usually written in first person from the student's perspective using positive, reassuring language to answer who, what, when, where, and why of the situation and/or target behavior.

Two main types of sentences are used when writing social stories: 1) descriptive and 2) directive. Descriptive sentences state the facts (e.g., "My name is ____." Or "The teacher is standing."), include thoughts and feelings of the 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 student if help is needed (e.g., "If I feel upset, my teacher can help by ____."), and express a shared opinion or reassure the student (e.g., "This is okay.").

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."), and gently direct behavior (e.g., I will try to ____."). Occasionally a couple of sentences generated by the student after reviewing the story that help the student recall and apply the information can be added as well.

When constructing these stories a ratio of at least 2 descriptive sentences are used for every directive sentence making the story more descriptive than directive is recommended. Pictures or illustrations are often added to enhance the student's understanding of the text. Try to tailor the format to the abilities and interest of the student and include what will likely happen if he/she correctly performs the target behavior(s) during the challenging situation.

3. **Share** the story with the student. New stories should be read frequently and prior to the challenging situation. The social story can be read less frequently as the student begins performing the appropriate behaviors described in the story during those challenging situations. Eventually, the social story may no longer be needed. For some students, periodic reading of the social story may continue to be beneficial long-term.
4. **Assess** the effectiveness of the story once the story has been used for a full week. Stories may need to be rewritten if students are not yet beginning to exhibit more appropriate behaviors or paired with visual supports to remind students of the desired behaviors in specific situations and reinforcements systems to encourage the appropriate responses.

A Social Story™ Example

Background: Sam is a young child diagnosed with Autism who sometimes wanders away from his family while on outings.

My family and I go to many places. (Descriptive) We go to the grocery store, the zoo, and the mall. (Descriptive) Sometimes there are lots of people! (Descriptive) When there are lots of people, my family might want me to stay close and hold their hands. (Descriptive) I might lose my family if I forget to stay close and hold their hands. (Descriptive) Losing my family means that I can't see them or touch them. (Descriptive) If I lose my family, I should try to wait where I am. (Directive) If I see a policeman in a uniform I can try to ask the policeman to help me find my family. (Directive) When I wait for my family to find me or ask a policeman for help, my family will be so proud of me for staying safe. (Descriptive)

References and Resources:

The Gray Center <http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories>

Gray, C. & White, A.L. (2001). *My Social Stories Book*. England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gray, C. & Attwood, T. (2010). *The New Social Story Book*. Arlington, TX: Future Horizons.