

Strategies for Effective Teaching and Learning

Social Stories™

Students with autism spectrum disorders typically experience difficulty interpreting social situations. These individuals are frequently unable to accurately assess and respond to various social, behavioral, and environmental cues. Social Stories™ represent an increasingly popular strategy for ameliorating these deficits and, in turn, enhancing the social skills of students with autism spectrum disorders. This intervention technique is also particularly helpful in facilitating the integration of pupils with ASD in inclusive learning environments.

A Social Story™ is an individually designed story aimed at increasing the individual's awareness and understanding of social situations and the perspectives of others while teaching appropriate responses and self-management techniques. The basic steps necessary for developing a Social Story™ include

1. targeting a specific problematic social situation,
2. identifying salient features of context and setting, and
3. sharing this information with the individual and others.

The following is an example of a Social Story™ that is designed to explain to a student when it is appropriate to run at school:

Running

I like to run. It is fun to go fast.

It is OK to run when I am playing outside.

I can run when I am on the playground.

I can run during P.E.

It is not OK to run when I am inside, especially at school.

Running in the hallways is not safe.

Teachers worry that other people may get hurt if I run into them.

When people are inside, they walk.

I will try to walk in the hallways and only run when I am outside on the playground.

Writing a Social Story™

Begin by observing the student in the situation you hope to address. Let the pupil's perspective tell you which aspects

of the situation should be the focus of the story. Include those things that usually occur in the social situation, but also consider possible variations.

There are generally four types of sentences used in writing Social Stories™:

- *Descriptive* sentences objectively define where a situation occurs, who is involved, what that person is doing, and why.
- *Perspective* sentences describe the reactions and feelings of others in a given situation.
- *Directive* sentences are positively stated, individualized statements of desired responses. They may begin with "I can try . . ." or "I will work on . . ." Try to avoid sentences starting with "Do not . . ." In the above example, the final sentence is the directive sentence.
- *Affirmative* sentences express a commonly shared cultural belief, opinion, or value.

A Social Story™ should have three to five descriptive and perspective sentences for each directive sentence. Avoid using too many directive sentences. They may be lost without adequate context.

Presenting a Social Story™

Customize the language and the presentation to students' abilities. Young children and nonreaders will need pictures to accompany the story. The pictures need to be very simple and very specific. Delete extraneous details and backgrounds. These children will also require larger fonts and less information on each page. A storybook is a good idea. For older pupils and readers, the story can be presented on one page. Alternatively, each sentence can be mounted on black construction paper and bound in book format while other students may be comfortable using an iPad.

Present the story in a calm, stress-free environment. Be consistent. Present the story once each day, preferably right before the particular event. Once the story is mastered and the individual has incorporated it into his or her social repertoire, slowly decrease its use.

The empirical evidence on the effectiveness of Social Stories™ is growing. It is currently considered a validated or evidence-based practice.

SOURCE: Original adaptation from "Social Stories," Center for Autism and Related Disabilities, University of Florida.

For additional information on using Social Stories™ with children with autism spectrum disorders, visit the Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding, <http://carolgraysocialstories.com>, and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center, www.kc.vanderbilt.edu.