

Writing Social Stories

Theory

Carol Gray has written a lot about social stories. She is based at the Gray Centre for Social Learning and Understanding in America.

Social stories were developed for use with people with Autism, in order to share information about social skills. However social stories can be used with a range of people to help them understand social situations.

Social Understanding approaches assume to teach 'appropriate social responses' by describing a situation and not telling people what to do.

People with autism have difficulties picking up clues from their environment and others around them and have difficulties with 'Theory of mind' – seeing something from another's point of view, and therefore need to learn what appropriate social responses are.

How to write a social story

A social story:

- Must be written specifically for an individual
- Must contain an introduction, body and conclusion
- Must answer 'wh' questions (e.g. who, where what, why when?)
- Must be written in the first or third person
- Must use positive language (e.g. 'I will try to walk' rather than 'I will try not to run')
- Must state the desired response that most people would give when in that environment / situation
- Must **not** contain long sentences, usually one idea per sentence.
- Considers the person's language ability, cognitive skills, attention levels and reading skills
- May include 'insurance policy' words, like 'usually' and 'sometimes' that allow for changes and flexibility. Do not state that something 'is' unless you can be 100% certain 100% of the time
e.g. 'I usually get the bus into town' rather than 'I get the bus into town'
- Should use concrete language supported by visuals - *be careful with the choice of pictures as the person may expect the situation etc to look as it does in the picture!!!*
- Must have a title that reflects the gist of the story

Social Story Sentence Types and Ratio Guidance:

- **Descriptive sentences** – which are accurate, assumption free and statements of facts
e.g. not include feelings that the person might feel ‘sometimes hand dryers make a noise’ rather than ‘I don’t like hand dryers’
- **Perspective sentences** – which describe other people’s feelings
- **Affirmative sentences** - which enhance the meaning of other sentences and may express a commonly shared opinion (e.g. ‘many people wear bicycle helmets, this is a sensible thing to do’)
- **Directive sentences** – which identifies a possible social response and/or gently directs behaviour (e.g. ‘I will try to sit quietly’ or ‘when.....I have two choices; I may sit quietly, I may stand outside’)

Social Stories must follow the social story ratio – that is;

0-1 directive sentences to each 2-5 descriptive, perspective or affirmative sentences.

Writing a Social Story

When writing your first social story it is advisable to gain help from your speech and language therapist. Once you have learnt the basics you will be able to replicate many more social stories to help with different situations.

There are many examples of when social stories may be used;

- A trip to the dentist
- A trip to the doctors
- Visiting a new place
- Learning how to queue/line up
- Learning to wait your turn
- Learning how to greet others
- Learning how to carry out skills independently

Please keep updated on our site with example templates to help you re-produce personalised social stories.