

Cheshire East Autism Team

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Social Stories

What is a social story?

A social story is a short story that describes what happens in social situations. The stories can help children with impaired social understanding to make sense of situations.

The stories are usually written specifically for a child and will mention the child's name and age. Social stories can be written for a variety of situations at school or home, for example shouting out in assembly, or being slow to get dressed in the morning.

Why use social stories?

Studies have shown that social stories help children with social and communication difficulties to have a better understanding of social situations and behaviour, and the stories are used to develop appropriate behaviour. The stories can be used to help prepare your child for a new experience e.g. moving school / class, and to help your child accustom themselves to a situation, and to respond appropriately.

The stories are particularly successful for children aged between 3 and 14.

How do I use social stories?

The story should initially be read approximately 4 times until you believe that the message in the story has been conveyed to your child. Some personal judgement is required and you may wish to read the story either more or less than 4 times, depending upon the age and ability of your child. It can be read to the child either at school or at home.

The story should be kept (we recommend that you laminate the story if possible) and read again if required. For example a social story about not always being first in line

may be successful for several weeks but your child may then begin to repeat the old behaviour. In this case the story should be read immediately, or as soon as practicably possible, after the repeated behaviour.

How do I write my own social story?

A social story should consist of 3 types of sentences as detailed below:

Descriptive sentences:

These sentences describe the current situation and behaviour. The 1st sentence should introduce the child's name, age, school (if appropriate), the 2nd sentence can begin to describe behaviour. For example:

My name is James. I am 8 years old and I go to St.Mary's school.

On Mondays we have assembly, Sometimes in assembly I shout out if my class don't win house points.

Perspective sentences:

Perspective sentences explain the point of view of others to the child. Children with social and communication difficulties can find it difficult to understand the feelings of others, so these sentences help them to understand situations from somebody else's view. For example:

This makes my Mum and Dad upset.

This makes my teacher upset and my teacher can be cross with me.

Directive sentences:

This type of sentence aims to encourage appropriate behaviour. It should however be stressed that the aim of social stories is to teach social understanding, not to enforce rote compliance, so the terms "I should..." or "I must..." must therefore be avoided. A good way to start a directive sentence would be "I will try to...". For example:

Next time I am angry I will try to go to my bedroom to calm down.

I will try not to hit my little sister.

Ending:

The story can be finished off with an idealistic ending which can include some further perspective sentences. For example:

If I go to my room to calm down Mum and Dad will be happy.

My little sister will be happy.

Everyone will be happy.

Pictures:

It is recommended that pictures are used to help explain the story wherever possible, as it is considered that children with social and communication difficulties respond particularly well to visual stimuli.

If you are creating the story on a computer clipart pictures could be used, or alternatively simple 'stick men' drawings could be drawn by hand.

Recommended reading:

Writing & Developing Social Stories by Caroline Smith - this book and many others are available from the library collection at CEAT

Recommended website:

www.nas.org.uk - this is the website for the national Autistic Society

Please see overleaf for an example of a social story