Information for parents and professionals

What are social stories?

Social stories are short stories. They describe situations or concepts in a format that is meaningful for people with developmental disorders. Social stories help people with developmental disorders to “navigate” a situation which they find difficult to manage.

Social stories are used as a communication strategy. They enable people to:
- understand a situation
- learn how to respond or behave in that situation.

For example:

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“Crying”

People sometimes cry when they feel sad.

It’s OK to be sad and cry. Later the crying will stop.

When people cry I can say: “it’s OK.”
When people cry I can give Mummy or a teacher a cuddle

When crying is too noisy I can walk away or cover my ears.
I can wait. Soon crying will stop and everyone will be happy again.
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Writing social stories

Social Stories contain sentences that are:

- **Descriptive:** What is going to happen?
- **Directive:** What should I do?
- **Perspective:** How do I or others feel?
**Descriptive sentences** describe the setting, activity, who does what and why. They are objective and do not assume reactions of the person. For example: “People sometimes cry when they feel sad”. Descriptive sentences help the person focus on relevant cues in situation. For example: “Later the crying will stop”.

**Directive sentences** tell the person what is expected as a response to the cues or situation described. For example: “When people cry I can give mummy or teacher a cuddle”.

Directive sentences often begin with the words:
“\*I can…….\*
“I will…….\*

**Perspective sentences** describe the reactions and feelings of the person and of others in the given situation. For example: “Soon the crying will stop and everyone will be happy again”.

**A social story ratio**
Most Social Stories have a ratio of two to five descriptive or perspective sentences for every directive sentence. The person is always one of the key characters. Social Stories are:
- individualised for the person
- relevant to the person’s life

**Why use social stories?**
- They explain how to behave in specific social situations.
- They teach specific social and communication skills.
- They assist in managing change.
- They reduce anxiety.
- They assist in managing repetitive behaviours.
- They help to cope with school curricula.
- They help to teach independent living skills.

**Who can use social stories?**
- People who are readers and non-readers.
- Verbal and non-verbal people.
- Any age group.

**How to write a social story**
**Step 1:** What is the situation with which the person needs support?
**Step 2:** What characteristics of the person do we need to consider?
- Attention span
- Motivators
- Learning support needs
- Vocabulary
- Reading ability
- Visual ability
Step 3: Give information about the situation from the person’s perspective
- who is involved?
- what happens?
- duration of the situation
- how it begins and ends
- consequences (both positive and negative)

Step 4: Writing the social story - guidelines

*Use ‘appropriate’ language*
- Appropriate to the person’s comprehension skills
- Vocabulary and language familiar to the person
- Short sentences are best

*Write from the learner’s perspective*
- Put yourself in the person’s shoes during observations
- Observe the person’s reactions to situations. What confuses, frightens, motivates them?
- Write in the first person: “I can……”, “I am ..........”, “My teacher……”

*Build in flexibility*
- Use sentences starting with “Sometimes........”, “Usually........”

*Define clear ways to signal the beginning and end of an activity*
- “My computer time finishes when the timer rings”
- “I can read my book until Mrs Ray writes our assignment on the board”

Step 5: Implementing social stories
- Read story with the person prior to use in the target situation.
- Check comprehension of the story.
- Initially read the story approximately once daily (or every time the target event occurs).
- As behaviour improves, gradually ‘fade’ the story.
- If needed, increase the frequency of use again.
- The learner can share the story with others.
- If the story is not working, check that it is:
  - accurate
  - positive
  - read at the relevant time
**Formats for social stories**

- Video taped versions
- Audio taped versions
- Flash cards
- Photo albums and card holders
- Wall sequences
- Booklets and ‘big books’

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**Sample stories**

**“People I can talk to”**

Sometimes I go shopping with Dad and Mum and we buy groceries and meat and clothes. Sometimes Dad and Mum buy me chips.

I talk to Dad when I am shopping. I talk to Mum when I am shopping.

Sometimes I give money to the shop lady.

I can say “hello” to the shop lady. I can say “thank you” to the shop lady.

I only talk to people I know at the shops.

I like to talk to Mum and Dad.

I am pleased I am learning who I can talk to.

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**“Playing games”**

I like to play games with other kids.

Sometimes I get to go first. Sometimes I don’t. I know other children also like a turn going first.

Sometimes I play a game and don’t even get a turn. That makes me feel angry but myself “I’ll get a turn another time”. I take a deep breath and sit quietly.

Sometimes when I play games I win. That makes me feel happy.

Sometimes I lose. I say to myself “Oh well. I hope I win another time”.

I take a deep breath and sit quietly.

Then I say “well played” to the winner and smile. I think of all the times I have won before. I say to myself “all kids like to win and everyone gets a turn to win”.

Other children like playing games with me because I’m such a good sport.

I like feeling calm after I have played a game.
“Working by myself”

I can do work all by myself.

Mrs. Hoare tells me exactly what to do.

I do my work as quickly as I can.

Sometimes I make mistakes.  Oops!

That’s okay. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes.  √

When I finish my work, I can colour in a circle on my chart.

When I have all the circles coloured in, I get to choose an activity that I like.

Mrs Hoare is so proud that I can work by myself.

I’m proud of myself as well.

My Friday test

Every Friday morning we have a test.
The test is straight after assembly.
I sit at my desk and I have my lead pencil ready.
Mrs Jones gives me a sheet of paper, face down so that I can’t see the writing.
Mrs Jones says “turn the paper over”.
I write my name at the top.
Mrs Jones talks to us about what is written on the paper.
She says “good luck, you can start now.”
I read the first question.
I think of the answer. I write down the answer if I know it.
If I don’t know the answer, I have a guess.
I need to try every question.
I feel good because I have finished my test.
Mrs Jones is happy because I have done my best.