

## 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:

**“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.  

### 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'

### 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.

#### "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.

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