

Social Stories™ were created by Carol Gray in 1991. They are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

The terms 'social story' and 'social stories' are trademarks originated and owned by Carol Gray.

## What are social stories for?

- Social stories can be used to:
- Develop self-care skills (e.g. how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed), social skills (e.g. sharing, asking for help, saying thank you, interrupting) and academic abilities
- Help a child to understand how others might behave or respond in a particular situation
- Help others understand the perspective of an autistic child and why they may respond or behave in a particular way
- Help a child to cope with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events (e.g. absence of teacher, moving house, thunderstorms)
- Provide positive feedback to a child about an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self-esteem
- As a behavioural strategy (e.g. what to do when angry, how to cope with obsessions).

## How do social stories help?

Social stories present information in a literal, 'concrete' way, which may improve a child's understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity. The presentation and content can be adapted to meet different people's needs.

They can help with sequencing (what comes next in a series of activities) and 'executive functioning' (planning and organising).

By providing information about what might happen in a particular situation, and some guidelines for behaviour, you can increase structure in a child's life and thereby reduce anxiety.

## EXAMPLE

### My toys

My toys belong to me. They are mine.

Many of my toys were given to me

Some of my toys have my name on them.

I may play with my toys or share them with someone.

I have toys that are mine.

## How to write a social story

Carol Gray says you will need to picture the goal, gather information, and tailor the text.

### PICTURE THE GOAL

Consider the social story's purpose, now think about what the child needs to understand to achieve this goal.

### GATHER INFORMATION

Collect information about the situation you want to describe in your social story. Where does the situation occur? Who is it with? How does it begin and end? How long does it last? What actually happens in the situation and why? If it is for a situation where a particular outcome is not guaranteed, use words like '**sometimes**' and '**usually**' in the story.

Stories should appeal to the interests of the child for whom they are written and avoid using words that may cause the child anxiety or distress.

The content and presentation of social stories should be appropriate to the child's age and level of understanding. Use age-appropriate photographs, picture symbols or drawings with text to help people who have difficulty reading or for younger children.

So gather information about the child including their age, interests, attention span, level of ability and understanding.

## TAILOR THE TEXT

A social story needs to have a *title*, *introduction*, *body* and *conclusion* and should use patient and supportive language.

It should answer six questions: where, when, who, what, how and why?

It should be made up of **descriptive sentences**, and may also have **coaching sentences**.

A **descriptive sentence** accurately describes the context, such as where the situation occurs, who is there, what happens and why, e.g.:

- My toys belong to me. They are mine.
- Many of my toys were given to me.
- Some of my toys have my name on them.

A **coaching sentence** gently guides behaviour, e.g.:

- I may play with my toys or share them with someone.
- Sometimes, I play with my toys with my sister
- Sometimes, I play on my own

## How to use social stories

Carol Gray has developed guidelines on how to use social stories effectively.

- Think about ways to aid comprehension – would adding questions help, or replacing some text with blanks for the child to fill in?
- Find ways to support the story, e.g. create a poster with a key phrase from the story.
- Plan how often, and where, the story will be reviewed with the child.
- Present the social story to the child at a time when everyone is feeling calm and relaxed, using a straightforward approach, e.g. 'I have written this story for you. It is about your toys. Let's read it together now'.
- Monitor how well the story is received and whether it is working as intended.
- Keep your stories organised in a ring binder or computer folder. This makes them easier to find and review, and to develop with new information.