

Social Stories

- A Social Story is a short story that describes a situation or social skill that an individual child is having difficulty understanding. The aim of the story is to provide the child with insight into the situation and to enable them to respond more appropriately to it.
- Carol Gray first defined 'Social Stories' in 1991 as an approach for children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders.
- The stories can be helpful for children who find social situations difficult / confusing but do not have ASD.
- Social Stories have a specific formula which has been found to be effective.
- There are books containing 'off the peg' social stories for common situations, but it can work best if stories are written with the individual child and situation in mind, by someone who know the child well.

Preparation for writing a Social Story

- Observe the child in the 'problem' situation and make detailed notes in order to obtain a complete picture of events.
- Through the observation, through talking to other staff, to parents and if appropriate, to the child, try and establish how the child perceives the situation. (It is particularly important to try and understand the child's perceptions and feelings when writing a social story).

Writing a Social Story

- The child's perspective determines the focus of the story.
- Most Social Stories are written in the first person, from the perspective of the child.
- Stories begin with detailed information which accurately describes the situation (where it occurs, who is involved, what they are doing and why). Stories usually include desirable responses and can also be used to prepare children for new situations.
- The formula that Gray proposes includes three types of sentence: **descriptive, perspective and directive.**
- It is important not to include too many directive sentences. Gray recommends a ratio of between 2 to 5 descriptive or perspective sentences for every directive sentence.

Descriptive Sentences

These describe what happens etc. These sentences should be as accurate as possible and contain words like 'usually' and 'sometimes' rather than 'always' in order to allow for change and to avoid over literal interpretation.

Perspective Sentences

These describe the reactions and responses of others in the situation and sometimes the reasons for their responses and may describe the feelings of others. (Gray advises against attempting to describe the feelings of the child we are writing the story for as we may have difficulty getting this right).

Directive Sentences

These describe desired responses to the situation, and tell the child, in positive terms what he or she should try and do or say in the situation. It is best to avoid unrealistic and inflexible statements like 'I will' And better to use phrases such as 'I will try' or 'I can....'.

Examples of Social Stories

1. 'Will my friend play with my toys?' (Written for use at home).
A friend is coming to my home. My friend knows I have toys. My friend is hoping to have a turn playing with my toys. I may let my friend play with my toys for a short time. This is called sharing my toys.

My friend knows my toys belong to me. He knows my toys stay with me when we are finished playing.

One day my friend may share his toys with me.

2. 'What is taking Turns?'
Sometimes, children want to play with the same toy. They may need to take turns with the toy. A 'turn' is a chance to play with the toy. Each child has a turn playing with the toy. This means that I will have a chance to play with the toy. I will have my turn with the toy.

3. 'How can I get a toy back?'
Once in a while another child may take my toy while I am playing. I can say, 'Please give my toy back!' This may work.

Sometimes, the child may keep the toy after I ask for it back. I have a choice. I may ask the child again. 'Please give that toy to me!' I may also choose to ask an adult to help. Adults know how to help children take turns with toys.

What Next

- For young children the story will need pictures or photographs.
- Share the story and get feedback from other relevant people that know the child well including the child's parents if they haven't helped write it.
- Read the story to the child each day – this should be an enjoyable experience.
- Create opportunities for the child to share their story with a range of trusted adults.

Social Stories for everyone

In Caroline Smith's book 'Writing and Developing Social Stories – Practical Interventions in Autism' she mentions how Social Stories can be helpful as a way of explaining rules and routines for all children. The example she includes is called 'Hello Time'.

References:

'The new Social Story Book' by Carol Gray (1994 future Horizons, Arlington)

'My Social Stories Book' by Carl Gray and Abbie Leigh White (2002 Jessica Kingsley).

'Writing and Developing Social Stories – Practical Interventions in Autism' by Caroline Smith (2003 Speechmark).
