

## USING SOCIAL STORIES: A TEACHING STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS

What are social stories?

A social story is a written story that prepares a child, young adult or adult (the individual) for new or difficult situations or events. The story:

- tells what will happen
- tells who will be there
- suggests positive activity for the individual to use (teaches actions)
- describes positive emotions that individual may feel (addresses emotions)
- describes positive ways the individual may view the situation (clarifies thinking)
- describes some of the thoughts or perspectives of others who will be present
- is individualized to each person and each situation

Why do social stories help?

Social stories:

- give information in advance, helping individuals prepare
- teach what the individual can and should do in the situation
- expose the individual to positive emotions to assist in emotional health
- expose the individual to positive thoughts to assist in self regulation
- expose the individual to the thoughts and feelings of others
- prepare staff for new or difficult situations or events
- address more than just what the person will do, viewing individuals as having mental and emotional health needs as well as a need for “good” behavior
- increase consistency from staff to staff, staff to families and from school to home or other environments
- are read aloud the same way every time making the information able to be learned more easily by individuals with good rote memory
- help to resolve previously unresolved issues
- help the individual look forward to receiving rewards

When should we use social stories?

Social stories are useful when:

- an individual is going to have a new experience
- the individual needs to learn new or improved social behavior
- the individual needs help learning about what other people are thinking or feeling
- the individual needs to change her/his emotional response to a situation or event
- a familiar situation or event is going to change in some way
- “the rule of three” happens (if it is the third time the individual has had difficulty in a situation or during an event)
- past history has left the individual nervous or anxious about a situation or event

What are the components of a social story?

Social stories include:

- a description of what will happen, when, who will be present, and where (such as “We will go to K-Mart with Mrs. Sims and Michael” or “We will see the seventh graders in the classroom before lunch.”)
- a description of positive emotions the individual may experience (such as “I will feel calm when I walk into K-mart” or “I will feel happy to see my friends in seventh grade”.)
- a description of positive thoughts the individual may have (such as “I will be able to find my desk

- because my name is on it” or” It will be loud but I can handle it.”
- a description of what others may be thinking or feeling (such as, “Michael will want to buy a new basketball at K-Mart” or, “The seventh graders will be hungry”.
- a description of what you want the individual to do (such as “I will stay with Mrs. Sims in K-Mart” or “I will walk quietly to my desk and sit down”.
- lists of action steps the individual might use, such as
  - Open the door.
  - Walk into classroom.
  - Walk to my desk.
  - Sit down.
  - Get out my math book.

a description of any rewards or reinforcing events that will follow

How do we anticipate events and write social stories?

Teams can:

- anticipate and discuss upcoming situations and events that may be new, surprising, confusing or difficult for the individual
- remember and discuss past situations or events in which the individual was not successful or did not demonstrate the needed skills
- identify needed components of the social story
- select team members to draft a social story to share with relevant members of the team for input

What does a social story look like?

Here are two sample stories:

1. I will go to K-Mart with Mrs. Sims and Michel. I will sit in the car and wear my seat belt. I will think about the new notebook that I will buy at K-Mart. I will be happy to have Michael with me. He is my friend.

In K-mart I will stay with Mrs. Sims. I will take turns with Michael. I will choose a new notebook that I like. I will give the money to the person at the cash register and they will put my new notebook in a bag for me. I will be so happy to have my new notebook. We will ride in the car back to school. I will walk quietly into school and show my new notebook to Robbie when I get back to class. It will be a very good trip to K-Mart!

2. I will go to the seventh grade room for study hall before lunch. I will sit quietly at my desk. My friends in seventh grade will be trying to finish their work. We will all be hungry. If I need help I will raise my hand and Mrs. Brown will come to help me. I cannot talk to my friends because we will be working. Later I can walk with Stephanie to the lunch room. I will be glad to finish my work and happy to have lunch!

Language Level Issues

Here are some language considerations in making your social stories:

- individuals often can understand more than they can express. That is why social stories work so well for individuals who are non-verbal or have limited verbal skills.

- keep the language used as simple as you can
- use words and expressions that are likely to be understood by the individual
- use the individual's name and the names of others in the story if it is likely that the individual does not understand pronouns such as I, my , we, us and they.
- create a happy ending in the social story
- use language in the social story to prepare the individual for what comes next

What are "emergency" social stories and when can I use them?

Emergency social stories can be written when you find out that a situation or event is going to happen in the very near future for which the individual may not be prepared. An example is finding out at 10 AM that there will be a fire drill at 10:30 AM, or finding out when you arrive in the morning that the hearing screenings will be done sometime that day. Emergency social stories:

- can be used as needed as soon as you get the information that something unplanned or unexpected is going to happen
- should be as simple as possible and focus on the most important actions, feelings and thoughts
- include positive statements describing how the individual will be able to tolerate this unexpected event

Where else can I get information about Social Stories?

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For more information about social stories, type the words "social stories" onto your search line. There are many good sites to visit.

### Write Your Own Social Stories!

Use these three "imaginary" situations to write three social stories using the attached format.

1. Amy dropped her tray in the cafeteria last year. Everyone laughed loudly when it happened and she got food all over her new shoes. Now that she is in eighth grade, she does not seem to want to go to the cafeteria. When she is in the cafeteria, she appears agitated and upset. She often refuses to carry her tray.
2. Tom is taking his first field trip. The first grade class is going by bus to the apple orchard. Everyone is bringing a sack lunch and will eat at picnic tables outside. Tom usually eats a hot meal at school and does not like cold food. He appears to be afraid of flies and other bugs. He has never ridden in the large school bus with so many children before. He likes to play hand held computer games.
3. Anton is going to be included in English in his new high school. Although he cannot speak, he uses an electronic voice output device and types on a portable keyboard. He moved to town

during the summer and does not know anyone in the English class. He has never been included with typical students before. In the past, he has sometimes reacted negatively to new experiences, especially when he did not know about them in advance.

## Format for writing a social story

Name of Individual:

Date:

Name of person(s) who will be using the story:

Prepare the individual for what will happen:

Talk about where.

Tell who will be there including who will be there to help the individual:

Talk about the timing, such as when will this occur?

Describe what s/he will do:

Describe what s/he might think about:

Describe what positive emotions s/he might feel:

Tell what others there might be thinking or feeling: