

What are Social Stories?

Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray in the early 1990s and are often used to support autistic people to gain greater understanding of social situations or things they might find difficult.

They do this by providing information, offering perspectives on other people's actions or sometimes explaining expectations. They can sometimes suggest alternative things the person can do to cope with or manage a situation. They are usually very short and are personalised to the individual.

Typical Social Story Topics

- **Self-help** e.g. dressing/undressing, using the toilet, brushing teeth
- **Behavioural** e.g. managing feelings, behaviours that cause difficulty, suggesting alternative responses
- **Social Skills** e.g. turn-taking, waiting in line, asking for help, understanding others
- **Changes to routines** e.g. fire alarm, moving home, supply teacher
- **Supplying positive feedback** e.g. celebrating success and highlighting strengths and achievements in order to raise self-esteem and confidence

There are Two Sentence Types in a Social Story – Descriptive and Coaching

- **Descriptive** – these are accurate and truthful and provide answers to **wh** questions (who, where, what, when, why). They can describe the *perspective* of other people (their thoughts and feelings). Or they can be *affirmative* – supporting previous sentences, providing reassurance, emphasising an important message or a common opinion or value.
- **Coaching** – these may suggest alternative desired responses, allowing for flexibility (I can try..., I might like... etc). NB: Coaching sentences never say 'I will' or 'I must'.

Some examples:

Descriptive	I am Sunita. I live in Woolwich.
Descriptive	Sometimes I think things get too noisy.
Descriptive	We often go to Nana and Grandad's on Sundays.
Descriptive	Sometimes we have to do things we don't want to do.
Descriptive (perspective)	Most people don't like queueing.

Descriptive (perspective)	My parents like it when my hair is washed.
Descriptive (perspective)	Everyone makes mistakes sometimes. This is how we learn.
Descriptive (affirmative)	This is OK.
Descriptive (affirmative)	This is a good idea.
Descriptive (affirmative)	I can be proud that I tried.
Coaching	I could try to ... instead.
Coaching	I might...

The basic sentence ratio:

- 4+ descriptive sentences for every
- 0-1 coaching sentence

Key Points

- Include an introduction, main body of the story and conclusion
- Keep the story as accurate and factual as possible
- Write with clear, *positive* language – it is not for telling off!
- Ensure the content and presentation is suited to the individual's age and level of understanding. Consider symbols or photos alongside the text where appropriate.
- Use 'I will try' rather than 'I will' in the directive/coaching sentences

Using the Story

Stories should be read 1:1 with the child regularly and ideally in advance of the situation they are about. They are not meant to be read 'in the moment' when the situation has happened or as a consequence. Ideally the child will be able to remember, or be reminded of, the story when the situation arises, and can use the coaching/directive sentence to better understand or adapt their response to something.

Once stories have been used successfully, they can be adapted include further targets. You could add sentences like..... 'Before, I used to find it difficult to... Now I can.' This story could then focus on a new target.

See www.carolgraysocialstories.com