

How to Write a Social Story™

TIPS AND RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS



What is a Social Story™?

Social Stories™ are effective methods to provide guidance and directions for responding to various types of social situations. The stories are used to describe social situations specific to individuals and circumstances while promoting self-awareness, self-calming, and self-management. Social Stories™ are not meant to change behavior; rather, they are meant to clarify social expectations. They may use images or words to present the situation.

Who Can Use a Social Story™?

While Social Stories were originally developed for children with autism spectrum disorders, they will be useful for any individual of any age who experiences challenges with appropriate social communication.

How to Write a Social Story™

Identify a situation in which the student is having difficulty understanding or exhibiting appropriate behavior. Social Stories™ are written for a variety of purposes based on a student's experiences or responses to events and situations in his/her world. Some common topics include responding to cues in the environment (e.g., fire drills), describing other people's points of view (e.g., some people like loud music), defining new routines (e.g., changing classes), outlining rules and expectations (e.g., having a substitute teacher), or describing an upcoming event (e.g., field trips, school programs).

Write the text of the story. Social Stories™ are usually written in first person from the student's perspective using pos-

itive, reassuring language to answer the who, what, when, where, and why of the situation and/or target behavior.

Two main types of sentences are used when writing social stories: 1) descriptive and 2) directive.

1. Descriptive sentences:

- State the facts (e.g., "My name is ____." Or "The teacher is standing.")
- Include thoughts and feelings of the student and others in the story (e.g., "The teacher will like it when I listen." Or "Many people want to learn.")
- Identify what others can do to help the student if help is needed (e.g., "If I feel upset, my teacher can help by ____.")
- Express a shared opinion or reassure the student (e.g., "This is okay.").

2. Directive sentences:

- Identify possible responses (e.g., "If I need a break, I can tell the teacher or put the break card on my desk and go to the beanbag.")
- Gently direct behavior (e.g., I will try to ____.").

When constructing these stories, maintain a ratio of at least 2 descriptive sentences for every directive sentence. Making the story more descriptive than directive is recommended. You might consider enlisting the student's help in generating some of the content. Adding pictures may help to enhance the student's understanding of the text. Try to tailor the format to the abilities and interests of the student and include what will likely happen if he/she correctly performs the target behavior(s).

Share the story with the student. New stories should be read frequently and prior to the challenging situation. The story can be read less frequently as the student begins performing the appropriate behaviors. Eventually, the Social Story™ may no longer be needed. For some students, periodic reading of the social story may continue to be beneficial long-term.

Assess the effectiveness of the story once the story has been used for a full week. If students are not yet beginning to exhibit more appropriate behaviors, stories may need to be rewritten or paired with visual supports to remind students of the desired behaviors or reinforcements systems.

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Social Story™ Example

Background: Sally is a fifth grader diagnosed with Asperger syndrome who will transition to the sixth grade. She is experiencing anxiety about the change.

There are many kinds of teachers in school. (*Descriptive*) It may be hard to get used to new teachers because I don't know them very well. (*Descriptive*) I will have a new teacher next year. (*Descriptive*) Her name is Mrs. Jones. (*Descriptive*) She will visit me on Tuesdays until the end of the year for a short time before lunch. (*Descriptive*) When I am with Mrs. Jones, I will try to be a good listener. (*Directive*) It may be fun to meet with Mrs. Jones because we might play games, listen to music, or just talk. (*Descriptive*)

Vanderbilt Kennedy Center

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center** (VKC) works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, service providers and advocates, researchers and policy makers. It is among only a few centers nationwide to be a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, a *Eunice Kennedy Shriver* Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Research Center, and a Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities Training Program. The following are some of the ways the Center's programs and staff can assist families, educators, and other service providers.

Vanderbilt Autism Resource Line

Free information and referral service for parents, teachers, and community professionals. Information is available about autism-specialized diagnostic evaluation services, school consultation, parent workshops, and professional training at Vanderbilt for children, adolescents, and adults with ASD. Contact autismclinic@vumc.org or (615) 322-7565, or toll-free (877) 273-8862.

Treatment and Research Institute for Autism Spectrum Disorders (TRIAD)

TRIAD is a Vanderbilt Kennedy Center program dedicated to improving assessment and treatment services for children with autism spectrum disorders and their families while advancing knowledge and training. See <http://TRIAD.vumc.org> or call (615) 936-0267.

TRIAD Families First Program

This free training series provides parents of children with autism (ages 2-5) with techniques to enhance social and communication skills and to manage challenging behaviors. Contact familiesfirst@vumc.org or (615) 322-7565.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a free statewide phone, web, and print referral service in English and Spanish. It connects the Tennessee disability community with service providers and resources. Its website database has over 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county and service. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC, TN Council on Developmental Disabilities, TN Department of Health, and the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Contact www.familypathfinder.org, (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636.

Two Easy Ways to Take Part in Research

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center serves families through research studies. **StudyFinder** is a searchable database that lists current VKC studies, including ASD research. Studies seek people of all ages with and without developmental disabilities. See kc.vanderbilt.edu/studyfinder, (615) 936-0448. **Research Match** is a secure place for volunteers and researchers to connect. Once you sign up and get added to the registry, a researcher will contact you if you're a possible match for the research study. See www.researchmatch.org.

Other Resources

- **The Gray Center for Social Learning and Understanding** The Gray Center cultivates the strengths of individuals with autism and those who interact with them, and globally promotes social understanding. Gray Center director, Carol Gray, developed the Social Story™ strategy. www.thegraycenter.org

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