

Social Stories

Social stories are short descriptions of a particular situation, event or activity, which include specific information about what to expect in that situation and why.

Social stories have a huge range of applications, including:

- to develop self-care skills (eg how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed), social skills (eg sharing, asking for help, saying thank you, interrupting) and academic abilities
- to help a person to understand how others might behave or respond in a particular situation, and therefore how they might be expected to behave
- to help a person to cope with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events (e.g. absence of teacher, moving house, thunderstorms)
- to provide positive feedback to a person 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).

Social stories present information in a literal, 'concrete' way, which may improve a person's understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity.

Social stories can help with sequencing (what comes next in a series of activities) and 'executive functioning' (planning and organising) - difficulties experienced by many people with autism.

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

Implementing and Using Social Stories

1. Present the social story to the person at a time when everyone is feeling calm and relaxed. This will maximise their learning and help them develop positive associations with the story. Social stories should never be used as a punishment for misbehaviour.

2. Use an honest and straightforward approach when introducing the story, eg I have written this story for you. It is about thunderstorms. Let's read it together now.

3. Review the story as often as required - some social stories will be reviewed initially once a day, others prior to the situation for which they were written.

4. Maintain a positive, reassuring and patient attitude when reviewing the story. This is essential for the social story to have the desired effect.

5. When reviewing the story, use a calm and friendly tone of voice and make sure the environment is quiet, comfortable and free of distractions.

6. Introduce one story at a time to maximise learning and to make sure the person does not become overwhelmed with information.