

Tips for Creating Social Stories

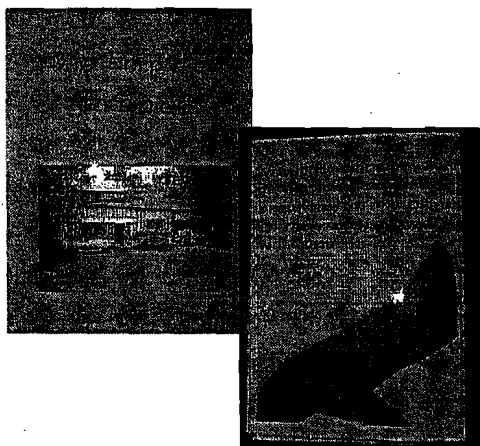
Florida State University Center for Autism and Related Disabilities

WHAT ARE SOCIAL STORIES?

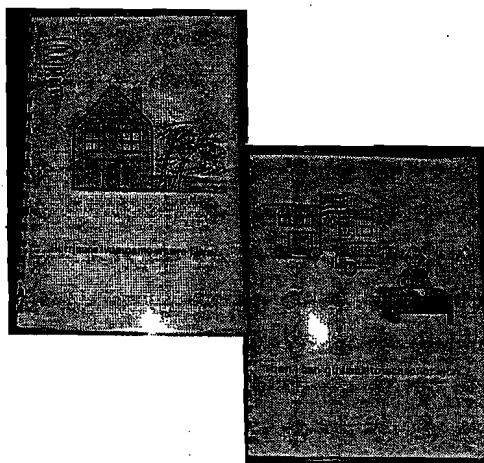
Social stories are short stories that describe a social situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and appropriate or expected behaviors. They provide individuals with specific information regarding what occurs in a given social situation, what behaviors are expected, and why. Social stories were originally developed for individuals with autism. They can also, however, be used with any individual who has social difficulties. Based on the individual's needs, a social story may:

- teach a new social skill or routine
- help prepare an individual for changes in routines or schedules
- prepare an individual for future or unexpected events
- explain social interactions in concrete terms
- explain the emotions and/or thoughts and feelings of others
- address behaviors such as aggression, fear, and obsessions and help teach more appropriate replacement skills or responses

Social stories can be written by parents, professionals, or peers. When appropriate, they can be written with the assistance of the individual who will be using the story. Social stories are individualized and unique to each individual and situation.



Hurricane Ivan Came Where I Live
This is an example of a typed social story with Boardmaker© pictures. It contains one sentence per page and was laminated and bound. The story served to explain a hurricane and its effects.

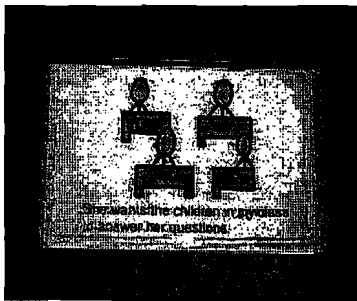


My Trip to France
This is an example of a hand written social story with real-life pictures and drawings. It contains two to four sentences. The story was laminated and bound as a book for a young girl preparing for a plane trip.

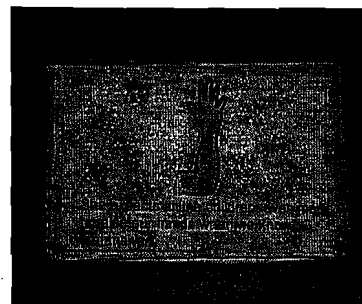
COMPONENTS OF A SOCIAL STORY

Social stories will vary considerably because they are written uniquely for a specific individual and specific situation. Their purpose is to provide concrete information about a specific social situation. They typically contain four types of sentences: descriptive, perspective, directive, and control sentences.

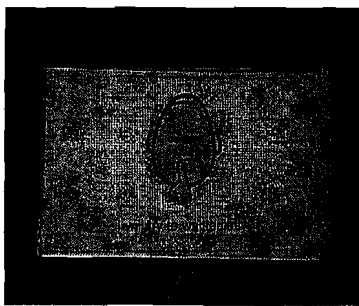
- Descriptive sentences answer the “wh” questions of who, what, where, when and why about the situation.
- Perspective sentences describe the thoughts, reactions, and feelings of other people in a given situation.
- Directive sentences tell the individual what a desired response would be. They are stated positively and often begin with “I can try..., I will work on..., or I will try...”
- Control sentences identify strategies that the individual can use to recall, understand, and apply the information. They are written by the individual and most applicable for use with adolescents or adults.



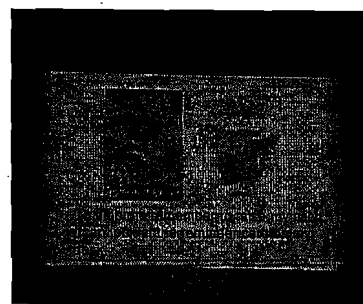
*Descriptive Sentence:
Answers “What” about the situation.*



*Perspective Sentence:
Describes the expectations and thoughts of the teacher.*



*Directive Sentence:
Tells the individual what to do during the situation.*



*Control Sentence:
Provides a strategy for the individual to remember.*

THE RULES FOR WRITING SOCIAL STORIES

Although each social story is individualized to the specific needs of a particular individual, there are some important guidelines that should be considered.

- Limit the use of directive sentences. For every 1 directive sentence, there should be 2-5 descriptive and perspective sentences.
- Write at or slightly below an individual's comprehension level. Use the words that he or she uses and understands. This is *not* a lesson in reading or vocabulary.
- Use pictures or simple line drawings, if needed, to increase comprehension. Carefully write from a first person perspective, as though the individual is describing the situation.
- Answer the "wh" questions "who, what, where, when, and why" about the situation. Include variations of the situation or routine. Think about what may happen differently to change the situation.
- Use caution with illustrations. Be careful of unrelated information that may be contained in photos or drawings.
- Functionally or visually define ambiguous terms. Translate abstract concepts into more concrete and easily understood ideas. "I will *behave* in church", for example, is abstract while "I will try to sit quietly in church" states the desired behavior in concrete, positive terms.
- Avoid terms like "always" (e.g., "My teacher will always call on me when I raise my hand") or "never" (e.g., "My family never runs in the house") in the story as these words can be interpreted literally. Instead, use words like "usually", "probably", or "sometimes".
- Avoid phrases like "I will" or "I must" as they imply the need for absolute compliance for the individual to be successful. Instead, use phrases like "I will try".

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW NOT TO WRITE A SOCIAL STORY

My name is Timothy and I am in Mrs. Holland's class.

I like to hit my friends and call them names.

It is very bad to hit people and call them names.

I will never hit anybody ever again or call anybody names.

When I want to play with my friends, I will say, "Will you play with me please?"

My friends will always play with me when I ask them nicely.

A BETTER EXAMPLE OF A SOCIAL STORY

My name is Timothy. I am in Ms. Holland's classroom at Fairfield School. There are 18 children in my classroom.

My classmates and I go outside on the playground after lunch. Some of the children play with the balls, some play on the jungle gym, and some of the children play chase.

Sometimes I want to play these games with my friends. Sometimes I call them names like "Dumbo" or hit them.

My friends do not like it when I call them "Dumbo" or hit them. When I call them names or hit them, they get angry.

When I want to play chase with a friend, I can walk up to him and say his name. Then I can say, "Do you want to play chase on the soccer field?", If I want to play 2-square with a friend, I can get a ball from Ms. Holland, walk up to a friend and say "Do you want to play 2-square?"

If my friend says 'yes' that means that he wants to play. If he says 'no', that means that he does not want to play with me at that time. If he tells me no, I can ask another friend to play.

I will try to ask my friends to play with me and will try not to hit them or to call them names.

HOW DO I USE SOCIAL STORIES?

Techniques for introducing and implementing social stories should be individualized based upon factors such as the age, developmental level, reading ability, etc. of the individual. General guidelines include:

- Introduce a story in a place with few distractions. Sit at the individual's side or in back of him/her. Explain how the story will be used and read through it once or twice.
- If the individual can read, have him/her read the story aloud.
- If the individual cannot read, try recording the story so that (s)he can listen to it on tape while looking at the book.
- Create a review schedule. Review the story at least once a day before the targeted situation. Be consistent.
- Monitor the individual's responses by keeping data on the targeted behaviors
- Fade out daily reading of the story once the target goal has been reached. Keep the story available, however, for later review if needed.
- Adapt, revise, or modify the story and review schedule as needed.