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Social stories

Social situations are constantly changing and this can be extremely frustrating for the child with autism, especially if he does not have the skills to interpret the change of social rules. Social stories are short stories specifically written to help the child with autism develop social understanding, so that he may learn how to interact appropriately with others. They also help the child to consider the perspective of another person.

The concept was developed by US author and educator, Carol Gray. For more information on Carol Gray's social stories visit her website at www.TheGrayCenter.org

It is important that a social story is introduced in a relaxed, positive environment where the student is attentive and can 'learn' the social situation and develop an understanding of the social context.

How to present social stories

- Read them to the child.
- Read the story onto an audio tape so the child can listen and read along to the story.
- Act them out with dolls or puppets.
- Have the child read them aloud.
- Afterwards, you can ask the child questions about the story, such as "How would you feel if?"

Tips for using social stories

- Use the child's name or nickname.
- Use 'kidspeak'.
- Personalise the story with the names of friends and favourite things.
- Write realistic dialogue that is age appropriate and matches the child's reading level.
- Don't write about what needs to be learned, have the character actually do what needs to be learned.
- Use the present tense.
- Repeat the important points of the story.
- Involve the child in writing and illustrating the story.
- Insert clipart or photos of the child to add interest to the story.
- Try to end each story with a 'confidence statement' such as "I can do it."

Note!

To avoid literal interpretations and to accommodate changes in routine and expectation, use the following words in the story:

Usually
I will try
Sometimes
Probably

Some children will memorise the stories and may criticise you or become upset if you change the text even slightly. To avoid this it may be a good idea to create several versions of the same story; rewriting it from different viewpoints and altering the wording of the key statements.

A great little site that explains the use of visual supports and social stories can be found at www.angelfire.com/ky/touristinfo/index5.html