

# Social Stories™

## Tip Sheet for Early Years Educators



### What is a Social Story™?

Social Stories™<sup>1</sup> with pictures help to communicate information about a situation, skill or concept in a way that is meaningful to the child. Social Stories™ can be used with any child or group. They are short, simple stories that break down a situation, skill, event or behaviour into smaller steps using images and text to support the child's understanding. They can help prepare children for challenging or unfamiliar situations.

### Why use Social Stories™?

Social Stories™ help explain to children what will happen in various situations and what they can do in different scenarios. The story can be customised for children's age and stage of development. Some stories may have very few words, with more pictures or photographs, while other stories may have more text. This will depend on children's skill-sets or preferences. They can also be a helpful tool to support understanding of common themes, such as turn-taking and sharing.



### Preparing the story

- Identify the situation you want the story to outline. For example, starting pre-school, taking turns, making new friends, moving to big school.
- Decide the format of the story. Will it be a video, a collection of photographs, drawings, animation, a small photo book or a PowerPoint?
- Use positive language in the story to explain to the children what will happen in each scenario. For example, 'I have gentle hands with my friends' instead of 'No hitting'; 'I share my toys with my friends' instead of 'Don't grab'; 'I listen to my friends and (name of Early Years Educator)' instead of 'No shouting'.
- Collect relevant images to insert into the stories for the social situations template.

<sup>1</sup> Gray, C. (2018) Social Stories 10.2 available at: <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Social-Stories-10.2-Criteria.pdf>

- These stories can be used with a whole group or can be adapted to the individual child as required. If you are adapting a story for an individual child it is recommended that you link in with the child's parents and therapists working with the child, if applicable, to support the development of the individual story.

## Carol Gray's Ten Steps to develop a Social Story

Carol Gray's criteria define what a Social Story™ is and the process undertaken when researching, writing and illustrating a Social Story. Follow the 10 steps to develop your own social stories.

### 1. Social Story Goal

Identify the goal to support the child.

### 2. Two-Part Discovery

Gather information to improve your understanding of the child and identify the story's topic and focus.

### 3. Three Parts and a Title

Include an introduction, body and conclusion. Add a title.

### 4. Four-mat

Tailor the story to the child's abilities, attention-span, learning style and if possible, interests.

### 5. Five Factors *define voice and vocabulary*

Use: First or third-person perspective; Past, present, and/or future tense; Positive and patient tone; Literal accuracy and accurate meaning.

### 6. Six Questions Guide Story Development

Include: Where, when, who, what, why and how.

### 7. Seven is About Sentences

Include descriptive and coaching sentences.

### 8. A Gr-EIGHT Formula

Guide rather than direct.

### 9. Nine to Refine

Review and revise the draft.

### 10. Ten Guides to Implementation

Plan for comprehension; Plan story support; Plan story review. Plan a positive introduction; Monitor; Organise the stories; Mix and match to build concepts; Re-run the story and sequels to tie past, present, and future; Recycle instruction into applause; Stay current on social story research and updates.

## Using Social Stories

Read the story outlining the social situation with the children. A copy of the story can be shared with the children's parents so they can also read the story with the children at home in English or their home language.

As the story is being read reflect with the children on each page and consider the following points:

- Observe the children's interests as you move through the story.
- Read at a slow pace, allowing the children the opportunity to say or do something
- Listen to what the children are telling you with their words, sounds, gestures or body language.
- Pause regularly and allow the children to ask questions and make comments.  
(Greenberg & Weitzman, 2005)

Ensure the story is in a place where children can access it freely as and when they require it. Read the story regularly with the children to support learning of new skills and to familiarise children with new or different situations. Repetition is essential to reinforce new learning for all children.

## Useful Links

<https://play.aim.gov.ie>

<https://aim.gov.ie>

<https://www.aistearsiolta.ie/en/>

<https://www.ncn.ie/index.php/for-parents>

<https://ncca.ie/media/3755/suggested-transition-activities-for-preschools.pdf>

<https://asiam.ie/category/social-stories/>

<https://ncse.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Social-Stories-Supporting-students-with-ASD-transition-back-to-school.pdf>

<https://www.naeyc.org/our-work/families/personal-stories-help-children-get-ready-school>

<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

<https://best-practice.middletownautism.com/approaches-of-intervention/social-stories/>

## References

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Gray C.A. (1998) Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations with Students with Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism. In: Schopler E., Mesibov G.B., Kuncle L.J. (eds) *Asperger Syndrome or High-Functioning Autism?*. Current Issues in Autism. Springer, Boston, MA.  
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Rota, M., (2011). *Use of Social Stories with students in an inclusive kindergarten classroom: An action research study*. University of Rochester.