



Social Stories

A social story is a short story written to meaningfully support students' understanding of a situation, skill or concept. The goal of a social story is to *describe*, rather than *direct* the student, by using positive and reassuring language to encourage a positive change in behaviour.

Keywords: *social story, information story, behaviour*

How to use a social story?

Below are a range of strategies to support successful implementation of a social story:

- Social stories are written to help students to understand a situation or skill in a safe, patient and reassuring tone. It is important that social stories are introduced to students in this manner. **Do not** use social stories to punish students as a consequence of their behaviour.
- Use kind language. For example, *I have a book for you, it's about going to the dentist. Let's have a look!*
- Sit in a position where you can both have joint attention on the book (not on each other).
- Aim to read the social story once per day. You can increase how often you read the story in the lead up to the event (e.g. day of an appointment, weekend before returning to school).
- To support generalisation, encourage different people to read the social story with the student (e.g. teacher, parent, coach, sibling).
- Fade out by gradually increasing the time between reading the story.

Case Study: Alistair

Alistair is eight years old and attends mainstream school. In class, he is not confident to ask questions or seek help. Reward systems have been in place; however, Alistair did not appear to respond to this strategy. His teacher created a social story to help develop his confidence and skills to speak up in class. Since the implementation of the social story, Alistair has begun to ask his teacher for help in a small group setting. He is working towards asking for help in the whole class setting.

How to make a social story?

There are a number of considerations when making a social story, including:

- Write the story from the student's perspective (e.g. Sometimes I have to brush my teeth vs People brush their teeth).
- Answer 'wh' questions, including *who* is involved, *where* and *when* a situation occurs, *what* is happening, *how* it happens, and *why*. Examples may include: details of what occurs, social expectations, suggestions of what to do or say and explanations of why people may feel the way they do (e.g. Mary gets hurt if I hit her.).



- Focus on positivity. For example, “use kind words” instead of “no swearing.” Negative language can also be less easily understood.
- Use concrete and easy to understand language. Match words with relevant pictures if possible.
- Use language that allows for flexibility. (e.g. Instead of “I catch the train every day,” write “I usually catch the train every day.” Instead of “I will sit quietly” write “I will try to sit quietly.”)
- Use pictures to support understanding of the social story’s message.
- Avoid getting confused with an information story. An information story provides only information about the situation and does not provide affirmation to the reader.

Writing a Social Story

A simple social story layout uses 3+1 Sentences:

Descriptive, Perspective, Directive + Affirmative

1. Begin by using a **descriptive** sentence which states the facts. The sentence should be free of assumptions or opinions (e.g. Sometimes I go driving with my brother.).
2. Use a **perspective** sentence to give simple information about *why* things happen and help give insight into other’s thoughts/feelings/opinions, etc. (e.g. My brother usually likes to go driving with me.).
3. Use a **directive** sentence to suggest a response or choice of responses for a given situation (e.g. “I will try to stay in my seat when I go driving with my brother,” or, “When we go driving I may decide to choose the radio station”).
4. Insert an **affirmative** or reassuring sentence following **directive** sentences wherever possible (e.g. “This is a clever choice,” or “This is a safe thing to do,” or “This is very important to me,” or “That is okay.”).

Tips for Writing Social Stories

- The title should focus on the overall meaning of the story. For example, “How to travel in the car safely.”
- For each directive sentence, two to five of the other three sentence types can be used.
- Avoid using too many directive sentences as the social story may seem “bossy.”
- Using iPad apps, such as *Pictello* and *Social Stories Creator and Library*, can provide another platform to access social stories.

How to make a social story interactive?

- Make reading the social story part of the student’s routine.
- Ask the student to answer questions about the story.
- Consider role play scenarios that are similar to the story. Begin by having the student observe others in the role play situation. If possible, move on to having the student play themselves in the role play.



Useful Tools for Creating Social Stories

- iPad app: *Pictello* - <https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/pictello-talking-visual-story-creator/id397858008?mt=8>
- iPad app: *Social Stories Creator and Library* - <https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/social-stories-creator-and-library/id588180598?mt=8>
- iPad app: *StoryMaker for Social Stories* - <https://itunes.apple.com/au/app/storymaker-for-social-stories/id570007786?mt=8>

Want to learn more?

To learn more about Language Disorder and how to support children and young people for whom language is their primary disorder, please contact Speech and Language Development Australia (SALDA). SALDA provides holistic, innovative and effective therapy, education and support services and has a transdisciplinary team of speech pathologists, occupational therapists, educators, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Contact: 1300 881 763 or hello@salda.org.au

Website: www.salda.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/SALDAustralia

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