

LADC Behavior Handout



Social Stories

Learn how to help shape desired behaviors in your child by utilizing social stories to teach and reinforce the new skills.

Social Stories

Often we teach our children about how to do things by walking them through the scenario ahead of time. This is an effective strategy for teaching children but can be made even more effective when putting visuals with the scenarios as you teach them!

What is a Social Story? It is a written or visual guide that describes many different social interactions, situations, behaviors, skills or concepts. Social stories can be used with all children with a wide variety of situations. One common situation when social stories are used is when children fail to grasp social norms, routines, or expectations. For example, you can use a social story to teach a child to walk down the hall, how to use the bathroom, how to follow the lunch routine, or how to ask for help. Social stories can also be used when your child already has the skill but needs some reminders of family rules or routines. Sometimes pairing the rules or routines with a visual can help your child remember them better. Maybe your child struggles sharing toys with other children; you can write a social story about that. Maybe your child has trouble with change or needs reminders of how to control themselves when angry; use a social story! Social stories can be used to aid in the development of appropriate behaviors or learning new routines. Social stories can be used to help teach or remind your child of just about anything. And what kid doesn't love a story about themselves?

Social Stories aren't designed to tell your child what to do but rather give them more information behind expectations of situations and why we do what we do. With more information, your child is more likely to engage in the desired behavior. Additionally, the social story helps to promote independence on skills so that your child is not always relying on an adult for prompts. You can take this concept into many different environments, such as from home to school, out in the community, or to a grandparent's house.

Social Stories Continued

How to Make a Social Story

Social stories are always written in first person and on your child's developmental skill level. Social stories always also incorporate pictures that are at your child's developmental skill level as well. Each social story is like a cartoon strip with pictures in sequential order showing what children are saying or thinking as they engage in a skill. Using pictures will help children capitalize on their visual processing strength in order to increase attention and comprehension. There are 4 different types of sentences that you can put into a social story to be effective!

Descriptive Sentences

These sentences are truthful and full of facts. They are free of opinion or assumption. Some examples are: "Most children go to the park to play" or "Most children run when they are outside on the playground." Descriptive sentences describe the context or the relevant but often unspoken parts of a situation, activity, or skill.

Perspective Sentences

These statements refer to or describe what someone is thinking or feeling. One example, "My teacher likes it when I sit quietly while she is talking."

Directive Sentences

These describe the desired responses to social situations. You want to minimize the amount of directive sentences within a social story. It is suggested to have 3 to 5 other sentences per directive sentences. Within directive sentences, you can provide one choice, or a couple of choices. An example is, "I will try to keep a quiet voice when riding in the car."

Affirmative Sentences

These express a commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture. The role of these sentences is to stress an important point. "This is okay" or "This is very important" are some example sentences.

Generally, the social story for a young child will contain 3 to 12 short sentences. You do not want to have much more than 12 as you will lose your child's attention to the important parts. Make sure to include the following answers to these questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how.

How to Use Social Stories

Stories are read repeatedly so that children overlearn them. Additionally, you want to read it again right before the problematic situation so that the information is fresh and serves as a prompt. Children don't always want to hear prompts from their parents over and over again. Social stories provide a creative fun way to prompt new skills. As you go through each page initially, teach your child about the steps (if it is a new skill). Stop at the pictures and ask them what is happening in the pictures. If they are not able to engage verbally or have limited language, you could ask them questions like "point to the picture that shows the child using walking feet." After reading the social story, you can role play the skill with your child.

Using Apps to Create Videos of the Social Story

Often you can just create a paper version of the social story like a story book and have your child go through each page. Another method to creating social stories is using an app so that you can create the book into a video that your child can “read” or listen to without your support. Since young children are not yet able to read, you would have to read the social story to them each time until they have memorized the story that goes along with the pictures. If you want to truly foster independence in your child or minimize your amount of effort you have to put in, it would be helpful to create a video of the social story with your voice reading the story on each page. Then you can just give your child the iPad or iPhone and have them watch it on their own. Additionally, many children now find video technology more motivating than picture books. If we can incorporate that into their social story, you may be able to sustain your child’s attention for a longer amount of time!

Story Creator is a free iPad app that makes it easy to create narrated picture books on your iPhone or iPad. To create a narrated picture book under this app, first select a picture as your book’s cover. Next, tap the “+” icon and import a picture, draw a picture, type some text, or do all three. After completing those steps, tap the microphone icon to record your narration. After making your recording, you can adjust it so that each word of the text is highlighted to match the timing of your narration.

Other Example Topics for Social Stories

- How to wait for an adult to help
- How to share with others
- Greetings towards other people
- Starting a conversation
- Asking someone to play
- Trying something new
- Accepting no for an answer
- How to handle mistakes
- Manners/Saying excuse me
- Hitting behaviors
- Washing hands
- Screaming/Using indoor voice

Using your Child in the Photos

Another option is to use your own child as the model for the photos. One benefit of this is that they get to role-play the scenario to take the pictures, so they are practicing the skill. Another benefit is that children are often more engaged when seeing pictures of themselves.

Example Social Stories

Not Listening

It’s important to look at people and stop what I’m doing when they have something to tell me. Sometimes grown-ups tell me very important things that I need to know. If I don’t, look & listen, I might miss something important and make the grown-ups angry. I know it’s wrong to keep doing what I’m doing when grown-ups want me to listen. I will listen to grown-ups when they talk to me.

Running

I like to run. It is fun to go fast. It’s okay to run when I am playing outside. I can run when I am on the playground. Sometimes I feel like running, but it is dangerous to run when I am inside. Running inside could hurt me or other people. When people are inside, they walk. Walking inside is safe. I will try to walk inside and only run when I am outside on the playground. My parents like it when I remember to walk inside.