Teaching Social Understanding Using Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations

What is a Social Story?

- It describes a social situation
- It gives relevant social clues
- It can define appropriate responses
- It presents social information, and aims to improve social understanding
- It should be the outcome of a process whereby a pupil is given assistance to:
  1. Organise their own experiences into a shared framework
  2. Enhance their own understanding of a situation or event
  3. Take on others' perspectives
  4. Learn appropriate responses

Who are they for?

- There were originally developed to help pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) but can be used and adapted to a variety of situations (e.g. language difficulties)
- They can help with pupils who have difficulties in understanding the expectations of adults
- They can help those who do not understanding the social setting or norms

When are they used?

- Each story should be written in response to an individual need
- They result from observing situations that are difficult for the child
- When the child's responses to questions about social situations may indicate that they are misreading the situation
The purpose of Social Stories

They were developed by Carol Gray in 1991 to help students with autism to understand the subtle rules of the social game and to address deficits in the ability to take the perspective of another person ('Theory of Mind').

Social Stories also help the child with ASD to organise his/her experiences into a shared framework and enhance his/her own understanding of a situation or even, the perspectives of others and the appropriate responses.

They can:

- Describe situation - 'sometimes my class teacher talks to everyone in class at the same time'.
- Give examples of social clues and appropriate responses - 'when someone says 'good morning' to another person it is polite to say 'good morning in reply'. When my teacher says 'good morning' to me I will say 'good morning' to her.
- Give information in a non-threatening way - 'hand dryers have a motor inside them. The motor has a switch, which turns off the dryer after a short time'.
- Personalise or emphasise social skills that have been learned - 'sometimes I play with Max at playtime. When Max asks me to play, I will try to play with him'.
- Translate a goal into understandable steps - 'when I go into school, I will hang my coat on my peg. Then I will sit at my table. Mrs M. will give me a timetable and I will ........................................ (pupil supplies the goal)
- Explain the fictional quality of films or books - 'I read about Thomas the Tank Engine in books. Thomas is not a real engine. Thomas is pretend. I can see real engines at railway exhibitions'.
- Teach routines to help children cope with changes in them - 'Teacher like to use the hall for their classes. On Fridays my teacher usually takes us to the hall to do some PE. Sometimes another teacher takes his class to the hall and the children in my class stay in their classroom to play games'.
• Help children to relate learned skills to real situations – 'In Mrs M’s group we play Lotto. We take turns to put small cards on the big one. Sometimes in Golden Time Alex ask me to play a game. I will try to remember to take turns with Alex when we are playing'.
• Addressing a wide range and variety of behaviours including aggression, fear, obsessions and compulsions – 'Sometimes I get angry. When I get angry I will try to say that I am angry'.
• Give information about a future event in response to a question – 'What will I do on the farm visit'.

How do they help?

The person with ASD sees the world as consisting of unconnected fragments and is often desperate to create order out of apparent chaos. This can lead to false assumptions as to why specific event occur.

Social Stories:

• Use a written medium (not always) to identify which details to attend to
• Show what these details mean
• Provide the ‘code’ to decipher what is relevant to a situation
• Explain the thread or themes that link specific events
• Correct false assumptions
• Provide the logical connections and enable the pupil to ‘see’ the big picture.
A Four Step Social Story

Step One – Picture the goal.

The goal is always to improve the understanding of the challenging skill or situation. Picturing the goal requires the story writer to identify the social understanding that logically results in the desired behaviour, then to translate that information in a concrete, tangible way in writing, with illustrations if possible.

For example, the goal may be to teach a child to cover his or her mouth when coughing. To achieve this goal, the child needs to understand why covering his or her mouth when coughing is important (i.e. it stops germs from being spread which may make other people sick). NAS (2011)

Step Two – Gather Information

By observation and interviews about the pupils’ interests, when the situation occurs, who is involved, how long it lasts, how it begins and how it ends, what occurs and why.

This scenario needs no explanation –

It is circle time.

When it is time for circle, I go sit in a blue chair.

I sit with my feet on the floor and my hands to myself.

It doesn’t matter who I sit next to. I will shake their hand and say good morning.

I help Mrs. G. at circle by listening...

Waiting my turn...

And sitting in my chair.

I don’t get angry when I don’t get a turn because I will get a turn another day.

When circle is over, I wait until Mrs. G. tells me where to go.

I did great at circle time today!
Step Three - Tailor the Text

Try to use these 10 characteristics

1. Introduction
2. Answers the ‘Wh’ questions
3. Be written in the 1st person
4. Uses positive language
5. Use up to 4 types of sentence
6. Uses words such as ‘usually’ and ‘sometimes’ to preserve accuracy
7. Uses vocabulary to reduce anxiety - ‘another’ instead of ‘different’, ‘better’ or ‘another’ instead of ‘new’.
8. Easy to understand text
9. Illustrations
10. A motivational style

Step Four - Title

The title states the goal or gist of the story, its overall meaning. Whether a statement or question, the title identifies and reinforces the most important information in the story.

Washing My Hands

People usually wash their hands using soap and water. There are five steps I will try to follow when washing my hands. An adult can help me learn these steps:

Turn tap on -
Put soap on my hands -
Wash hands together under water -
Turn tap off
Dry hands on a towel
# Types of Sentence

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<th>Sentence type</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| **Descriptive** | Answers the ‘wh’ questions *where* does the situation occur, *who* is it with, *what* happens and *why*? Descriptive sentences need to present information from an accurate and objective perspective. | *Christmas Day is December 25.*  
*Most children go to school.*  
*Sometimes I get sick.* |
| **Perspective** | Refers to the opinions, feelings, ideas, beliefs or physical/mental well-being of others. | *My Mum and Dad know when it is time for me to go to bed.*  
*Teachers like it when students raise their hand to ask a question in the classroom.*  
*Some children believe in Santa Claus.* |
| **Directive** | Gently offers a response or range of responses for behaviour in a particular situation. It is important that these sentences have a positive focus and be constructed in ways which allow flexibility (i.e. avoid statements like I must or I have to). | *I will try to cover my mouth when I cough.*  
*I might like to play outside during lunchtime.*  
*I will try to stay in my place.* |
| **Affirmative** or Rationalisation | Statements that enhance the meaning of the previous sentence (which may be a descriptive, perspective or directive sentence) and can be used to emphasize the importance of the message or to provide reassurance to the person. | *(I will try to hold an adults hand when crossing the road). *This is very important.*  
*(Thunder can be very loud). This is ok.* |
| **Co-operative** | Sentences which identify how others may be of assistance to the person *(developed by Dr Demetrious Haracopos in Denmark).* | *Mum and Dad can help me wash my hands.*  
*An adult will help me when I cross the road.*  
*My teacher will help me to try to stay calm in class.* |
| **Control** | Statements written by the person with an ASD to provide personal meaning to a particular situation and to assist them to recall and apply | *My body needs food several times a day; just like a steam train needs coal to stay running.* |
Partial | Incomplete sentences, which allow the person to guess the next step in a situation, and may be used with descriptive, perspective, directive, affirmative, co-operative and control sentences.  

| My name is ___________ (descriptive sentence)  

| Mum and Dad will feel ___________ if I finish all my dinner (perspective sentence)  

| NAS (2011)  

**As a rule the recommended ratio irrespective of length of story is:**

0 - 1 Directive Statements  

2 - 5 Other types of Statement
Some Examples

When I feel Angry

Sometimes I feel angry.

All people feel angry at one time or another.

When I get angry I will find my teacher, Mummy, Daddy or another adult.

When I find them I will try to use words to tell them that I am angry.

I can say "I’m angry!" or "That makes me mad!"

It is okay to use these words when I feel angry.

They will talk to me about what happened and about how I feel.

This might help me to feel better.

Wherever I am I can try to find someone to talk to about how I feel.

Brushing My Teeth

At night I need to brush my teeth so they are clean.

I put the toothbrush in my mouth.

First I brush in the back on the bottom.

Next I brush in the back on the top.

Then I brush in the front on the bottom.

Last I brush in the front on the top.

When I am done brushing my teeth I can spit out the toothpaste.

I can rinse off my tooth brush after I spit.

When I am ALL DONE I can have something special.
My Teacher Talks to Many People

My teacher talks a lot.

Sometimes she talks to me.

She gives me directions and helps me with my work.

Sometimes she talks to other people.

She might talk to other children about their work.

She might talk to another adult.

It is okay when she talks to other people.

When my teacher talks to other people I can keep working or playing.

This will make my teacher happy.

I will try to keep working or playing when my teacher talks to other people.

Sharing

I may try to share with people.

Sometimes they will share with me.

Usually, sharing is a good idea.

Sometimes I share with someone, they may be my friend.

Sharing with others makes them feel welcome.

Sharing with others may make me feel good.
Comic Strip Conversations

These are illustrations of conversations between people using drawings.

- **ToonDoo** is a free, online comic-creating tool.
- After registering to use this service, you can create Social Story cartoons and save them to your computer or print them off to read.
- It's great for Social Stories and Comic Strips

http://www.toondoo.com/Home.toon
Are illustrations of conversations between people using drawings.

Identify what people say or do

Show what people may be thinking

Can report the past

Can describe the present

Can plan for the future

Can help sequence events

Can offer solutions

**Media Stories**

Describe confusing or ambiguous situations

Describe the difference between ‘pretend’ and ‘real life’

**Thinking Stories**

Describe what people may be thinking

Show thoughts and emotions

Can be used to explain meaning

Can be used to explain requests

**Picture Stories**

For very young children
Teaching Social Understanding Using Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations.

John Fielding Community Special School

Outreach Service