Social Stories™ 10.0: The New Defining Criteria & Guidelines

Welcome to this issue of the Jenison Autism Journal, devoted to the new Social Stories Defining Criteria & Guidelines. We've a wonderful announcement to make, too! This journal will soon be the Autism Spectrum Quarterly with a new look and many improvements... For details, see page 1 (opposite).

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Once upon a time there was a little newsletter that began in a brick-walled school building in Jenison, Michigan. It was called, simply, The Morning News, a name which paid homage to the freshest and most productive part of the day.

The brain child of the Jenison Public School’s autism consultant Carol Gray, The Morning News began to grow and prosper. Under Carol’s expert and loving tutelage it began to garner not only a national, but also an international presence. Where newsletters of lesser “stuff” might have paled in the glare of the spotlight, The Morning News flourished. All the while it remained true to its mission to bring down-to-earth, practical information to families, professionals, and persons with autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

The little newsletter that was not so little anymore celebrated its entry into “adolescence” with a new name, for in the year 2002, The Morning News became The Jenison Autism Journal. Notwithstanding its new name, some things about it didn’t change—like its commitment to quality and excellence. Over the years, first as The Morning News, and most recently The Jenison Autism Journal, this “little newsletter” has covered some of ASD’s most important issues, and it has done so with the thoroughness and attention to detail that the autism community has come to associate with Carol Gray.

With the dawn of the year 2004 the “little newsletter” has come of age, and to celebrate this new phase in a most impressive literary career, the Jenison Public Schools is turning over the reigns of The Jenison Autism Journal to Starfish Specialty Press. There will be many new and exciting features in this new publication, but as in the past, there are some things that won’t change—like its commitment to quality and excellence!

Something Old...

The same commitment to Excellence, Quality, and Practicality that Jenison Autism Journal subscribers have come to expect

Something New...

A Brand New Name ★ A Great New Look

Coming July 2004...

Lots of Exciting New Features:

• Articles by, for, and about individuals with ASD
• A focus on families and family issues
• Spotlight on Best Practices: Each issue will highlight an educator, clinician, or paraprofessional support person whose work on behalf of those with ASD has been exemplary.
• A Tips and Strategies section
• Book Reviews and Recommended Resources
• Contributions by outstanding professionals in the ASD field
• And lots more to be announced in the next and final issue of The Jenison Autism Journal

Current subscriptions to the Jenison Autism Journal (JAJ) will automatically roll over to Autism Spectrum Quarterly. Detailed information will be forthcoming in the next and final issue of the JAJ.

For additional information log on to www.ASQuarterly.com
Social Stories™ 10.0: The New Defining Criteria & Guidelines

- Carol Gray

If you want to learn how to write a Social Story™, this is your article! A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. Since the introduction of Social Stories™ in 1991, the Social Story Guidelines have helped parents and professionals develop stories for children and adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). Those wishing to secure a complete description of the Social Story Guidelines have discovered they appear in relatively few resources. First discussed in an article, Social Stories: Improving Responses of Children with Autism with Accurate Social Information (Gray & Garand, 1993), and subsequently in chapters and other resources (Gray, 1995, Gray, 1998a; Gray, 2000a; Gray, 2000b; Gray, 1993-2004), the guidelines for writing Social Stories™ have changed very little since their introduction. The continually expanding use and popularity of this approach has created a need for an updated, detailed delineation of what is - and is not - a Social Story™. As a result, the original Social Story Guidelines have been expanded and reorganized into 10 defining characteristics; criteria and guidelines that clearly distinguish Social Stories™ from fiction and traditional non-fiction, task analyses, social scripts, or other visual strategies. This article introduces and describes the new Social Story Defining Criteria & Guidelines in terms of their importance to every author and every audience of Social Stories™.

People with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) of all ages are the most frequent “audience” of Social Stories™. Social Stories™ were originally developed for children and adults diagnosed with ASD to give “a meaningful voice” to patient, accurate descriptions of social concepts, skills, and events. Though the new defining criteria and guidelines are based on the learning characteristics of people with ASD, experience indicates Social Stories™ may also be helpful for those with other impairments, as well as for those who are developing normally. For our purposes here, discussion and examples will focus on children with ASD ages 3-12.

We are the authors of Social Stories™; parents and professionals who come from diverse cultures, backgrounds, careers and roles, with a wide variety of beliefs, abilities, strengths, and weaknesses. Our numbers include family members, teachers, speech and language pathologists, researchers, neighbors, friends, psychologists - and you. This article is for anyone who writes - or is learning to write - Social Stories™; people motivated by a singular purpose to share information with children in a meaningful way.

Topics for Social Stories™ are identified by a child’s experiences and/or responses to his/her social world. They are useful for a variety of purposes that include but are not limited to: identifying important cues in a given situation; describing abstract concepts or another point of view; defining new routines or rules; explaining the rationale behind expectations; outlining an upcoming event; and/or applauding accomplishments. Consequently, their titles range from Learning to Use the Toilet to Angela Makes Friendly Choices, to Restating with Respect (Gray, 2003) to AOK Ways to Finish My Work at Lincoln School (Gray, 2003), to The Custodian Does Not Use Overhead Projectors to Keep Spiders out of the Bathroom (memorable, but unpublished).

The Social Story Defining Criteria and Guidelines support the development of each Social Story™. They are our tools - like an artist’s palette and paints - that govern content, format, and style. Ultimately they ensure that every Social Story™ has its unflattering, characteristic “heart”; a patient and reassuring quality. This is our “set of paints” - the most detailed and comprehensive guidelines to date - complete with case examples!
A Social Story™ meaningfully shares social information with a
customer and reassuring quality, and at least 50% of all Social
Stories™ applaud achievements.

The goal of a Social Story™ is to share accurate social information in a patient and
reassuring manner that is easily understood by its audience, affirming that which a child
currently does well 50% of the time. This goal is the first of 10 defining characteristics that
sort Social Stories™ from their literary imitators. To clarify our discussion between
stories that do - and do not - meet all of the Social Story Defining Criteria and Guidelines, the use of a capitalized “s”
makes the distinction. The terms Social Story™ or Story (Social Stories™, Stories) are used interchangeably to refer
to documents that meet all defining criteria. In contrast, story, with a lower case s, is used in reference to documents
that do not comply with all of the guidelines. That being said, it’s important to clarify three misconceptions that cause
those of us intending to write Stories to write stories instead.

The most common misconception is that the goal of a Social Story™ is to change a child’s behavior. This has never
been the case. While it is often a child’s behavior that will draw attention to a specific concept, skill, or situation that
needs attention, if the goal is to change the child’s behavior, we are likely to focus on “telling the child what to do”.
Chances are the child has been told what to do, perhaps many times. Instead, our focus is on the underlying causes
of frustration. We attempt to identify and share information that supports more effective responses. The theory is
that the improvement in behavior frequently credited to a Social Story™ is the result of a child’s improved
understanding of events and expectations.

A second misconception, closely related to the first, is that the goal of a Social Story™ is to make our lives as parents
and professionals a little easier. Admittedly, if a child’s response to a given situation improves, our experience may
subsequently improve as well! That being said, Social Stories™ are not about us or our convenience. They are not
about improving our daily routine or situation, at home or at school. We’re important, yet we should not in any way be
attached to the reason for writing a Social Story™. If we are, experience suggests that the text or illustrations will
reflect what we want the child to do more than sharing important information that the child may be missing. Words
with roots in author expediency give themselves away every time; thankfully, they have found no place or role in
Social Stories™ to date.

The third misconception is that Social Stories™ are used only to address concepts, skills, and situations that are
problematic for a child. This is not true. Social Stories™ are also a record of a child’s current achievements, what
he/she does well, with a requirement that 50% of the Stories developed for any audience - child or adult - are praise
for positive traits and accomplishments. In practice, this means that for every Story that instructs, another is written
that acknowledges and/or affirms.

The original rationale for Social Stories™, now increasingly supported by first-hand accounts and research, is that a
child or adult with ASD may frequently perceive social events differently. This requires us, as parents and
professionals, to “abandon all assumptions” in favor of considering a child’s learning style, abilities, interests, and
challenges, and their impact on his/her social understanding. In other words, we try to determine what an event may
look, feel, smell, or sound like - or how a concept may be perceived - from the child’s point of view. This is
reminiscent of Stephen Covey’s fifth habit of highly effective people to “…seek first to understand, then to be
understood” (Covey, 1989, p. 236). Keeping with the goal of sharing information, we identify the concepts or skills
related to the topic that will be most relevant for the child. The criteria and guidelines keep information positive and
clear, and give each Social Story™ an unflattering, unassuming posture.
A Social Story™ has an introduction that clearly identifies the topic, a body that adds detail, and a conclusion that reinforces and summarizes the information.

Similar to all good stories, Social Stories™ have three basic parts: an introduction, body, and conclusion that help to efficiently organize the information. Recognizing the purpose of a Social Story™ and its unique audience, these “story basics” take on increased importance.

Writing with the introduction, body, and conclusion in mind structures our efforts, and helps us efficiently identify (introduction), describe (body), and reinforce (conclusion) the most important concepts in a Social Story™. The introduction focuses our attention on the first challenge of clearly stating the topic. A single sentence may complete the task: If I lose a toy, people can help. Sometimes, we may recruit the child’s attention first, My name is Jeremy, and then announce the topic. The body immediately follows the introduction, adding further description and/or explanation with statements like, Mom or dad knows how to help find my toy. We will try to think and look. The conclusion refers us back to the beginning - the concepts, situations, and/or achievements that initiated the Story - restating the original purpose with the benefit of additional information: People can help me look for my toy. Collectively, the introduction, body, and conclusion guide the development of Social Stories™ regardless of their complexity or length. (For further discussion of the lost toy Story, see Illustrations: A Case Example, p. 18.)

In addition to organizing and sequencing our direction while writing a Story, the framework provided by an introduction, body, and conclusion clarifies information for the audience. For a child reading or listening to any story, knowing what it is about early on (the introduction) provides a frame where all subsequent details can be placed (the body), and the overall meaning can be considered (the conclusion). The same will be true of the Social Stories™ that we create, with one difference. Our audience is likely to have inherent difficulty conceptualizing, sequencing, and “getting the gist” or the bigger picture. This increases the role and importance of a clearly defined introduction, body, and conclusion.

A Social Story™ answers “wh” questions.

Basic information about a specific topic (situation, interaction, concept, or skill) is needed to write a Social Story™. Basic, that is, with plenty of details! The five “wh” questions can serve as an outline that identifies where and when the situation occurs, who is involved, how events are sequenced, and what occurs. Next, the “obvious” details are considered. What cues or concepts may the child have missed? Often, this is also the answer to the last “wh” question, why.

At face value, looking to “wh” questions to describe the basic features of a situation or concept seems quite simple. Occasionally, this is where our greatest challenge may lie, especially in terms of why. One of my first Social Stories™ was developed for a kindergarten student to describe “lining up” at school. I sat a long time trying to figure out why it was so important to have children stand and walk in lines, a little desperate that if I couldn’t come up with
the rationale, how could we support the practice? Rest assured that thousands of Social Stories™ and many years later, only once have I been at a loss to figure out why. It was for a Story to describe a child’s kindergarten routine. I couldn’t make sense of the eight adults and seven locations that were to be part of his daily schedule! What was I to write? Sometimes, adults design overwhelming programs for innocent children. This is okay. Unable to describe his program in good conscience, I abandoned writing the Story in favor of making the needed changes in his school day. The process of answering “wh” questions, coupled with the collective accuracy and sincerity required by the other guidelines, renders it impossible to write a Social Story™ to describe or “sell” an unwise idea, strategy, or plan.

A Story can answer “wh” questions very efficiently. For example, a single, opening sentence can answer many “wh” questions: My family is going to the beach today. This may be followed with a brief statement that answers how the trip to the beach will occur: We’ll ride in our car to the beach, or a sentence that explains why this activity is planned: Many families have fun when they visit the beach. In this way, a Social Story™ succinctly identifies who is involved, where and when a situation occurs, what is happening, how it happens, and why. Before writing the first sentence, another who must be considered: whose voice tells the Story?

A Social Story™ is written from a first or third person perspective.

Selecting the perspective from which to share the information in a Social Story™ is important, and pre-requisite to placing any words on paper. The second person perspective is never considered, due to its directive quality. That leaves a choice between the first or third person perspectives. A few factors impact this decision, and ultimately determine the Story’s voice.

Most Social Stories™ are written from a first-person perspective, as though the child is describing the event or concept. This perspective is often the best choice when writing for younger or more severely challenged children; it presents information from the vantage point that a child has ready access to: his own. We must be careful to ensure that the information in a Social Story™ is - above all else - accurate. This increases our responsibility to take extreme care not to “put words into the child’s mouth” or place in writing what is nothing more than an uninformed guess regarding the child’s perspective on the situation. For example, we may feel convinced that air hand dryers frighten a child, citing the 40 times the child has bolted from restrooms containing them. Without additional information beyond our quick assessment of the child’s feelings, it is best to avoid sentences like, I am afraid of air hand dryers, in the Story™. A better option is to patiently describe how air hand dryers work, or include sentences like: Many people use air hand dryers to dry their hands. They press the button and rub their hands together. The dryer turns off by itself in about one or two minutes.

A Social Story™ may be written from a third-person perspective, like a newspaper article. These Stories, referred to as Social Articles, may use columns, advanced vocabulary, and/or Times New Roman font to minimize any “babyish” or insulting quality to the text. For these reasons, Social Articles are often developed for an older or more advanced child, or an adolescent or adult.
Both the first and third person perspectives offer the kind of flexibility that writing a Social Story™ requires! For example, some children may benefit from the use of realistic, fictional characters to model new skills; enabling a child to safely learn from a character's experience. The popular Social Story™, Watch, Listen, Move Closer, Ease In (Gray, 2002), is written from the first person perspective. In the Story, the child's "voice" describes the efforts of a fictional character, David, to join another child at play. Another example, Gray's Guide to Compliments (1999), is written from a third person perspective for adolescents and adults. In this case, several fictional characters are used to demonstrate a wide variety of concepts and skills related to giving and receiving effective compliments. Despite the accuracy and objectivity that Social Stories™ require, the first or third person perspectives can easily accommodate creative additions - like fictional characters - to make a Story interesting and educational.

There are several factors that determine the voice of a Social Story™. A child's age and ability are given first consideration. As mentioned earlier, the first-person perspective is often a better "fit" for a younger or more severely challenged child; the third-person perspective is usually used with an older or more advanced child, adolescent, or adult. These are general "rules-of-thumb" that may yield to other individual factors. It is very possible that an older, advanced child may prefer the reassuring quality of Stories written in the first-person, or that a young child may respond more readily to Stories written from a third-person perspective. This requires us to use what we know about the child as our guide to this - and every decision - encountered in the process of developing a Story.

A Social Story™ uses positive language.

A Social Story™ uses positive language. This is important in descriptions of behaviors, especially those that are typical or desirable in a given situation. A child with ASD is likely to be challenged, corrected and re-directed more than his or her peers. Placing descriptions of negative behaviors in writing only provides those behaviors with additional emphasis. This includes negated verbs, as in I will try not to yell in the library. Instead, by clearly and positively describing desirable responses, I will try to talk quietly in the library, and the rationale behind them, we share ideas about what to do in a given situation.

Social Stories™ keep a child's self esteem safe. Sentences like, I have difficulty listening to the teacher, or Sometimes when I am angry, I hit people, provide little usable information. If a reference to a negative behavior is made, it is done with caution and from a third-person - rather than using a first-person perspective. For example, Sometimes, children make mistakes. This is okay. Keeping information and statements positive and general helps to build and preserve a child's positive self esteem while sharing what may be brand new social information.

A Social Story™ always contains descriptive sentences, with an option to include any one or more of the five remaining sentence types (perspective, cooperative, directive, affirmative, and/or control sentences).

Understanding the types of sentences, their role in a Social Story™, and their relationship to one another is central to writing the text. There are six types of sentences: descriptive, perspective, affirmative, cooperative, directive and control. Each has defining characteristics and is used in a Social Story™ following a specified frequency, the Social Story Formula (the seventh guideline). This section describes each type of sentence and its role (summarized in Figure 1, page 8).
Descriptive Sentences are factual statements that are free of opinions and/or assumptions. They identify the most relevant factors in a situation or the most important aspects of the topic, forming the “backbone” of a Social Story™. The only required type of sentence in a Social Story™ and the most frequently used, descriptive sentences contain answers to the “wh” questions that guide story development. The objectivity of descriptive sentences brings logic and accuracy to a Social Story™ – two qualities likely to be reasserting to those who are overwhelmed by social concepts and situations. Sample descriptive sentences include:

a. My name is __________ (often the first sentence in a Social Story™).
b. Sometimes, my grandmother reads to me.
c. Many children play on the playground during outdoor recess.

Perspective sentences are statements that refer to, or describe, a person’s internal state, their knowledge/thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, motivation, or physical condition/health. We may be prone to making mistakes when guessing a child’s perspective of a situation or motivation. For this reason, perspective sentences are rarely used to describe the internal status of the child with ASD. The only exception to this occurs when the child’s own references to positive thoughts or feelings are used (i.e. I really love to swim with Jake) or the content of the sentence is a “pretty safe bet”, likely to be true of all people (i.e. Sleeping helps me feel rested). Most of the time, perspective sentences refer to the internal status of other people. These sentences give a Social Story™ a “heart”, describing the emotional and cognitive aspects that are a critical part of every social situation. Sample perspective sentences include:

a. My teacher or substitute knows about me (knowledge/thoughts).
b. Sometimes, my sister likes to play the piano by herself (feelings).
c. Some children believe in the Easter Bunny (belief).
d. Many adults like calamari (opinion).
e. Some children like to earn stickers for helping at clean-up time (motivation).
f. Sometimes, people feel sick (physical condition/health).

Cooperative sentences identify what others will do to assist the child (developed by Dr. Demetrious Haracopos, Denmark). For example, in a toileting story, a cooperative sentence may read: My mom, dad, and teachers will help me as I learn to use the toilet. For an older school-age child, a cooperative sentence may read, My art teacher can help me with my painting. In this way, cooperative sentences remind parents, peers, and/or professionals of their role in the success of the person with ASD. They may also help to ensure a consistent response by a variety of people to a behavior or situation. A cooperative sentence may be written as a partial statement to help a child identify others who may assist him as he learns a new skill, and how they can help. For example, People who can help me get my boots on are _______, or When I feel frustrated, others can help me by ________.

Directive Sentences gently guide the behavior of the child with ASD by identifying a suggested response or choice of responses to a situation or concept. These sentences are carefully developed with close attention to the possibility of literal interpretation. For example, beginning a directive sentence with I will or I can may mislead a child who may believe that the response must be completed exactly as written, with no room for error. Instead, directive sentences
Figure 1: The Six Types of Social Story Sentences

**Descriptive Sentences** are factual statements that are free of opinion and/or assumptions.

**Perspective Sentences** are statements that refer to, or describe a person’s internal state, their knowledge/ thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinion, motivation, physical condition/ health.

**Cooperative Sentences** identify what others will do to assist the child.

**Directive Sentences** identify a suggested response or choice of response to a situation or concept gently guiding the child’s behavior.

**Affirmative Sentences** enhance the meaning of surrounding statements and often express a commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture.

**Control Sentences** are statements written by the child to identify personal strategies for recalling and applying Social Story information.

often begin with *I will try to..., I will work on..., or One thing I may try to say (do) is...* Directive sentences may also be stated as a series of response options. Sample directive sentences are:

- a. *I will try to keep the paint on the paper.*
- b. *I may ask Mom or Dad for a hug.*
- c. *I may decide to play on the swings. I may decide to play with something else.*

**Affirmative Sentences** (named by Jo Bromley, England) enhance the meaning of surrounding statements and often express a commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture. (Statements representing an individual opinion or that of a small group are not affirmative sentences.) Specifically, the role of an affirmative statement is to stress an important point, refer to a law or rule, or reassure. Usually, affirmative sentences immediately follow a descriptive, perspective, or directive sentence. Sample affirmative sentences include (in italics):

- a. *Most people eat dinner before dessert.* *This is a good idea* (stressing an important point).
- b. *I will try to keep my seat belt fastened.* *This is very important* (reference to a law).
- c. *One child slides down the water slide at a time.* *This is a safe thing to do* (reference to a rule).
- d. *The toilet makes a sound when it flushes.* *This is okay* (reassure).

**Control sentences** are statements that are written by a child with ASD to identify personal strategies to recall and apply information. A control sentence often reflects a child’s interests or favorite writing style. First, the child reviews the Social Story™, adding one or more control sentences. For example, 7 year old Taylor is very interested in water heaters and forklifts. Taylor also has many specific fears, with severe weather topping the list. He will cry and scream incoherently during the many tornado watches that come with every spring. A Social Story™ explains that parents know how to keep children safe during tornados. After reviewing the Story, Taylor adds his own control sentence: *If there’s a tornado my mom or dad can help me hide near the water heater!*
**Partial sentences** are statements that incorporate the familiar fill-in-the-blank format. They are often used to check comprehension, or to encourage a child to make guesses regarding the next step in a situation, the response of another individual, or his/her own response. In a Social Story™, a descriptive, perspective, cooperative, directive, affirmative, or control sentence may be written as a partial statement. A selected portion of the sentence is replaced with a blank space. For example, following a series of sentences describing why children have to walk in lines at school, a partial perspective sentence concludes with: *Sometimes, teachers ask children to walk in a _____.* Filling in the blank encourages a child to retrieve critical concepts, an important step toward applying the information at school. In this way partial sentences provide an opportunity for a child to increasingly participate in the review of a Story while at the same time taking ownership of its contents.

Sometimes, a child may review a Story and fill in the blanks with a word or phrase not found in the original Story. If the meaning is the same, there’s no need for correction. If the child’s meaning is different from that of the original text, it may need to be checked, revised and/or corrected. First, the text is reviewed to ensure that it is clear if interpreted literally (more on literal accuracy later), if it isn’t revisions are made. If the text checks out and the child has inserted words or phrases that reflect his/her own errors or differences in social perception, these are discussed with references back to the original version of the sentence and Story.

Younger audiences or those who are more severely challenged are likely to require additional support to use partial sentences effectively. A few simple strategies may help. The first is to review a Story several times with complete sentences, gradually inserting a blank space into a key sentence, or sentences. As the Story is subsequently reviewed with the child, the blank creates a pause that encourages the child to complete the thought. There is another option, one that does not require printing a new version of the Story. In this case, the Story is read as if it contains a partial sentence, pausing to create a “space” for the child to contribute the missing words. Either way, a partial sentence can encourage a child to contribute to the reading process and comprehension of the Story.

**A Social Story™ describes more than directs, following the Social Story™ Formula.**

The Social Story Formula (Gray, 2004) is an equation that defines the relationship between the different types of sentences in a Social Story™. It’s purpose is to ensure that every Story focuses on describing interactions or events, or explaining the rationale that underlies what people think, say, or do in a given situation. At the same time, the formula limits sentences that suggest what a child “should do” in a given situation. In fact, in many cases, the use of directive or control sentences may not be necessary or advisable. Knowing how to use the formula is central to writing Social Stories™.

Sentences in a Social Story™ are sorted into two categories: those that describe and those that direct. Sentences that describe include descriptive, perspective, cooperative, and affirmative statements. Collectively, they work to share information: answering “wh” questions (descriptive sentences); explaining what other people may know, feel, or believe (perspective sentences); describing how others will support the child (cooperative sentences); and reinforcing important concepts (affirmative sentences). Sentences in this category play a leading role, providing that patient and reassuring quality that is characteristic of all Social Stories™.
Sentences that direct in a Social Story™ also share information. Their role is to guide or suggest what a child may say, or do, in a given situation. Included in this category are directive sentences (written by the parent or professional) and control sentences (developed by the child, adolescent, or adult with ASD). These sentences are in the minority in a Social Story™, outnumbered by their descriptive counterparts by a ratio of at least 2 to 1.

Using the Social Story Formula is a simple mathematical process. Given a completed story, the total number of sentences within each category are totaled and placed in the formula in Figure 2. Sentences that describe are placed in the numerator, those that direct in the denominator. Because we cannot divide by 0, if there are no directive or control sentences use 1 as the denominator. When the denominator is divided into the numerator, a Social Story™ will always result in an answer of 2 or more. Conversely, if the answer is less than 2, the story is not a Social Story™, it’s... something else.

Figure 3: The Social Story™ Formula

\[
\frac{\text{describe}}{\ast\text{direct}} \geq 2
\]

*If there are no directive and/or control sentences, use 1 instead of 0 as the denominator.

In addition to defining the relationship between the various types of sentences, The Social Story Formula can help parents and professionals identify sentences that are potentially unclear or confusing. Sometimes, a single sentence may meet the defining criteria for more than one type of sentence. For example, My mom and dad are calm while I learn to use the toilet is a perspective sentence, which could also be considered a cooperative sentence. Since both perspective and cooperative sentences are in the same category (describe), it’s unnecessary to determine if it is one type of sentence or the other. Sometimes the sentence types in question are from different categories. For example, consider the sentence, I may use the computer. Is the intent to describe one of many activity options in the home or classroom, making this a descriptive sentence? Or, is its intent to direct the child to use the computer? When it’s confusing whether the role of the sentence is to describe or direct, the statement needs to be rewritten to clarify its meaning. In this way, the Social Story Formula catches confusing sentences before a Story is reviewed with a child.

One of the most frequent mistakes in developing a Social Story™ is directly related to its formula. Many of us, parents and/or professionals with wonderful intentions, will write stories that are more directive than descriptive. Experience indicates that this error tends to increase over time: we may initially write Stories that follow the formula, gradually developing stories that direct more than they describe. In other words, if the story were tested against the Social Story Formula it would yield a number less than 2. Thus, 2 is a very important number when it comes to writing Social Stories - one that can quickly sort the “genuine articles” from other literary works. A solution of 2 or more, in a Story that meets the other nine defining criteria, is a Social Story™.
A Social Story™ has a format that is tailored to the abilities and interests of its audience, and is usually literally accurate.

Customized clothing tailors and those of us who write Social Stories™ engage in a similar art. Despite the fact that we follow a pattern, our final products are one-of-a-kind. A tailor alters seams and darts to create an individualized "fit", wisely relying on client choice for style, fabric, and buttons. In the same way, we make alterations in format to write text that "fits" a child's learning characteristics, and consider other personal factors to engage the child's interest and attention.

A manufacturer can make a great shirt that fits a million people, and a "generic" Social Story™ may help thousands of children. There is value in shirts and Stories for the masses. Still, there's nothing like having a personally tailored shirt; it fits better, wears longer, and has that "it's you!" quality that earns front and center placement in the closet. Similarly, the "originals" among Social Stories™ are the heirlooms of personal social learning. Their messages and meanings make them candidates for a "Social Story™ Hall of Fame". This section looks at the important, basic alterations that can be made in length, organization, sentence structure, and vocabulary to fit the learning characteristics of a child with ASD, closing with a description of a few memorable Stories whose formats were creatively tailored to the children who called them "mine".

For our purposes here, format refers to how information is structured and shared with the child. Tailoring of format involves the length of the Story, organization of the text within it, and selection of appropriate sentence structure and vocabulary. There are a myriad of potential choices that lie within these factors. Many factors will be quickly eliminated as the child's attention span, need for repetition and predictability, and tendency to interpret information literally are used as a guide to selection. The format, in other words, is developed from an understanding of the child, so that in turn it may help the child understand.

**Story length** The information in a Story never exceeds or falls short of a child's attention span. How short is "short enough"? How long is "long enough"?

For many audiences, the time required to peruse each page - or an entire Story - needs to be brief! Generally, a Social Story™ for a young child will contain 2-12 short sentences (eliminating commas to create two or more shorter sentences is often recommended). This matches the duration of many of their other interactions and activities throughout the day. Shorter Stories are among the most challenging to write. A common struggle occurs when we become caught between the simultaneous (though opposing!) goals of covering the topic, while at the same time keeping the Story brief. A good solution is to "write everything down" first, then edit the text back to the desired length. Sometimes, a topic will be impossible to cover in a short Story. To meet the demands of the topic and respect the attention of the child, information can be broken down into two or more shorter Stories. Called Social Story Sets, this format limits the length of each Story while making it possible for us to include important details and link concepts.
Typically, longer Stories are developed for children who are older or more advanced. These Stories will contain 12 sentences or more - up to and including extensive articles written according to the Social Story Guidelines. Dr. Tony Attwood has shared that for children with ASD the "...worst insult is to be made to feel less intelligent". These children value their intelligence and rightfully so! Fortunately, considering the often complex topics that accompany increased age and skill, having more time to explain the "ins and outs" that are involved is a welcome and necessary freedom! In this case "25 words or less" isn't desirable or necessary; covering the topic takes a higher priority.

Attention span does not operate alone. Captivate a child's interest and the attention span lengthens accordingly. A child may have an avid and lasting attention that is exclusively reserved for a specific topic, like the Civil War or blue oscillating fans, while other topics and activities are delegated markedly shorter consideration. That's where other aspects of the format, specifically organization, sentence structure, and vocabulary, can help Stories engage a child for learning.

**Organization and sentence structure** The organization of a Social Story™ - how sentences are developed and used in relationship to one another - complements a child's ability and interests. Conversely, any organization that is challenging or confusing is avoided. A Story's organization should also be consistent with the topic. A case in point is a memorable Story about the value of organizational skills at school that made little sense and quite frankly was very difficult to follow! Several strategies can be used to develop and arrange the text in a Story to improve the likelihood that it will be effective. Here a few of the most common Social Story™ strategies are discussed, specifically the use of repetition, rhythm, and rhyme.

**Repetition, rhythm, and rhyme** Repetition, rhythm, and rhyme may be an excellent match for a child who thrives on routines and predictability. These elements are frequently used in books and programming for young children. The popular Dr. Seuss books, and the television series' Mister Rogers and Sesame Street have capitalized on repetition, rhythm, and rhyme for many years. They are organizational elements that can hold a child's attention, and especially for a child with ASD, infuse familiarity into a new or difficult topic. For these reasons, many Social Stories™ use repetitive phrasing, as in: *On the playground, I may play on the swings, I may play on the slide, I may play on the monkey bars, or maybe play something else.* Others incorporate rhythm, with strategies as simple as placing an equal amount of text - or one simply stated concept - per page. Rhyme is often overlooked as Stories are developed, despite the important role that it can play. Rhyme does not have to be used throughout a Story to be effective or valuable; it may be used to emphasize one idea, for example, *Feeling angry is okay: What's important is what I do and say.*

Repetition, rhythm, and rhyme frequently overlap one another. For example, a Story that uses repetition is also likely to have a rhythmic quality. One Story from My Social Stories Book (Gray & Leigh-White, 2000, p. 132), *What does it mean to run out?* serves as an example (Figure 3). The Story addresses the unpredictable and rather abstract concept of "running out", using repetition, rhythm, and rhyme to structure and "lighten" this potentially upsetting topic. The Story opens with repetitive phrasing that identifies specific examples, items a child may order in a restaurant that could be out of stock. A general question, *What does it mean to run out of supplies?* uses rhyme to pull the introduction together and identify the topic. The rest of the Story answers that question, with an emphasis on the people and processes that may help the child "move though" this unanticipated development (running out) to its resolution (working with others to order something else).

Stories that incorporate repetition, rhythm, and rhyme are also easier for children to remember and apply to "real" contexts. They are easier for parents and professionals to recall and use at "just the right time" as well! For example, a child has reviewed the Story about restaurants running out of supplies a few times. The situation suddenly presents itself during the course of a family dinner at a favorite restaurant. Mom or Dad can refer to the
Story by reciting a key phrase from it to help the child retrieve and apply the information to the current context. This is called doing the Story, a strategy that is simplified if the phrases and/or sentences rhyme.

Repetition, rhythm, and rhyme may not be attractive elements for all children. Children who are older or more advanced may be insulted by a format that uses these elements, leading to rejection of a Story because it's "babyish" or written for someone much younger or "less intelligent". They may also begin to reject Social Stories™ in general for the same reason.

In summary, there are options when writing and organizing Social Story™ sentences. Repetition, rhythm and rhyme are basic strategies that are among the most frequently used, especially with younger children. These elements can capture a child's attention, build a familiar format around an unfamiliar topic, and create a Story that is predictable and easy to review.

There are many other organizational strategies that extend beyond the limits of this article that may be more suitable for older or more advanced children, or adolescents and adults (for example, Social Articles, mentioned earlier on page 5). Similar to a "domino effect", the many decisions related to organization influence the selection of vocabulary, which is discussed in the following section.

**Modifications in vocabulary and literal accuracy** Vocabulary is the basic messenger of meaning in a Social Story™. It plays an important role that determines whether a Story is accurate and comfortable to review. Here, it's not "...what we meant to say" that's important, but also "how we say it". Words are selected with that in mind. This section includes four guides to help parents and professionals select and employ words that work well with children with ASD.

1. **Words and phrases are selected that will be accurate, even if interpreted literally.** Many children with ASD make "face value" assessments of phrases and statements, without the benefit of the meaning that social insight provides. For this reason, a Social Story™ contains the most absolutely sincere language possible; there is no difference between intended and stated meanings. If the intended meaning of a word or phrase differs from its literal interpretation, it is not used. The only exception to the requirement for literal accuracy is when metaphors and analogies are used, described in more detail later.

2. **Verbs are carefully selected.** Children with ASD often struggle with the meanings of verbs. It's easy to appreciate the potential for confusion. Two considerations apply. First, positive verbs are preferable to their negated counterparts. For example, instead of: *I will not run in the hallway*, it's better to use: *I will try to walk in the hallway*. Second, verbs are notorious for the subtle but critical contrasts between them. Consider for example, the literal
difference between Dad will get the milk at the store, and Dad will buy milk at the store. People who get milk may be shoplifting; we want Dad to buy the milk!

3. **Alternative vocabulary may be used to maintain the relaxed and positive quality of a Story.** Some children will demonstrate strong negative emotional reactions to specific words. For example, words like change, new, or different may be associated with uncomfortable situations, and needlessly distract attention from the topic of the Story. Other words may be used in their place that relay the same meaning. For example, instead of new, the word better may be used; another can be used instead of different; missing may be a better option than losing. The use of alternative vocabulary helps to keep a child’s attention on the topic at hand. Though the use of alternative vocabulary may not always be necessary, it can be an important strategy that makes all the difference!

4. **Carefully selected metaphors or analogies may be used in a Social Story™.** Some children may be able to appreciate and understand the use of metaphors and analogies. Though they may not be “literally accurate”, metaphors and analogies can tie text to images and concepts that build in additional meaning. In addition, they often capitalize on a child’s interest to make a point or share information. For example, one child learned to conceptualize people “changing their minds” as an idea becoming better - *like a caterpillar changing into a butterfly*. Child generated metaphors are often the most effective, although those developed by parents or professionals with consideration of a child’s interests often have positive results as well.

To summarize our discussion of modifications in vocabulary, when writing a Social Story™, the “first words that come to mind” may not be the best to place on paper. Four considerations apply: 1) literal accuracy, 2) careful selection of positive verbs, 3) the possible use of alternative vocabulary, and 4) the option of metaphors and analogies.

There’s a final element included in the eighth Social Story™ criteria: **creativity**. Our discussion of Social Story™ formats concludes with case examples of ingenious Stories destined to become real heirlooms of social learning.

**Memorable Formats**  Creativity is right at home in the eighth guideline. The basic format considerations related to length, organization, and vocabulary are just the beginning! Enthusiasm can lead to “museum-quality” Stories that utilize unique formats to create meaningful ties between text and topic. There are countless examples. One grandmother embroidered a Social Story™ about what love means on a quilt for her grandson’s bed. A mother pasted a Social Story™ about buying new shoes on the top of a shoe box, placing photos of the exact shoes her child would try on in the box (taken the day before with a digital camera and the store manager’s permission). For a child with an interest in the United States Postal System, Stories arrived via the mail, in interesting containers with postmarks from new locations. One teacher cut the pages of every Story into a representative shape; for example, a Story about lunch was cut in the shape of a lunch box. Frustrated by the behavior of an entire classroom, a music teacher wrote a Story that identified the rules, and then set it to music to open each lesson. These ideas serve as inspiration of the potential for building additional meaning and fun into Social Stories™.
Creativity and caution are excellent co-workers in developing these uniquely personalized Stories. The wealth of possibilities can potentially distract us from the original goal to effectively share information in a Social Story™. What seems fun and cute may be confusing or even frightening to a child. A case in point: two enthusiastic and well-intended parents wanted to prepare their son, Dustin, for the costumes and activities surrounding Halloween. Dad approached his son to introduce the Story™. All that stood between this moment - and the possibility of another Social Story™ success - was the furry, bright blue head-to-toe monster costume that Dad had chosen to wear. Dustin screamed and refused to read it - even after the costume was removed. It was now and forever to be known as The Monster Story. The child's needs, abilities, and challenges are our only gauge to determining which ideas may be "too much" versus those that promote attention, interest, and motivation.

In summary, the eighth guideline is all about words: how many are used; how they are organized into sentences, how they are selected and interpreted, and their potential for placement in highly creative formats. Caution is taken to select and organize words to fit a child's abilities and learning style. Words usually don't work alone in a Social Story™; illustrations frequently share the task - often with similar considerations in their use. The following section discusses how illustrations can be selected to become effective partners with the text.

A Social Story™ may include individually tailored illustrations that enhance the meaning of the text.

Illustration plays a critical role in many Social Stories™. For our purposes here, illustration refers to the use of visual arts to support the meaning of text. At their best, illustrations can captivate a child's interest and improve comprehension. Conversely, they may have an adverse, confusing impact. Other considerations also apply. For example, can a child illustrate his/her own Story? To guide our decisions related to illustrations, this section describes the basic forms of illustration, the pros and cons of each, what to do when the child is the illustrator, and concludes with a case example.

**Illustration Options** In a Social Story™, the most common forms of illustration are drawings, photographs, and objects. Recently, PowerPoint™ has been added as a fun, intriguing, and versatile source of illustration and animation. Each has benefits and drawbacks.

**Drawings** - images that we create, as well as those available through computer programs - are the most frequently used to illustrate a Social Story™. Pictures that we draw ourselves are the most flexible method of illustration, enabling us to completely control content and style. Sometimes, computer-based artwork and images may be effective. They are convenient and quick to use, and their ever-increasing numbers and styles provide plenty of choices! In general, a drawing should be simple, easy to identify, interesting to the child, and "generic" enough to apply to a variety of settings.

Drawings may be misleading if interpreted at face value. If a child makes frequent literal interpretations of words and statements, he/she may do the same with drawings in a Story. For example, Casey's mother has written a toileting Story, and has drawn corresponding pictures with plenty of detail and eye-catching color. Throughout the story Casey is pictured in a bright yellow shirt and blue pants. In addition, the bathroom is drawn with two small, symmetrical windows. Casey concludes with some relief that should he ever get a yellow shirt (which he currently does not own) and find himself in a bathroom with two small symmetrical windows, he may be asked to try to use the toilet. Imagine his distress with those who ask him to use a toilet without those factors in place! Casey's literal
interpretations of illustrations will not be an issue for all children. His experience represents one perception in the range of possibilities for us to consider when drawings are used to illustrate a Social Story™. Other children may be able to readily apply and generalize detailed, colorful drawings to other contexts. In Casey's case, we may choose to avoid the use of color or extensive detail to minimize the potential for misinterpretation.

*Photographs* may also be used to illustrate a Social Story™. The benefit of photographs is that: 1) they may hold meaning for a child where drawings have failed; 2) they are accurate; and 3) they are fast and easy to create, particularly if Polaroid™ or digital cameras are used. One drawback to photos is related to their accuracy. A photo may be too accurate; some children may assign irrelevant meaning to extraneous detail. For example, consider the photo of a father teaching his son to ride a bicycle on the right. A child with ASD may look "past" what we feel are the most important features of this photo, perhaps responding enthusiastically to the type of tree in the background or an item on the ground. For this reason, photographs best illustrate Social Stories™ when their subjects are simple and the meaning is clear. Black and white photographs may be helpful, as they contain interesting subject details and minimize extraneous factors (color, for example). In addition, circling important details on a photograph can help direct a child's attention to the most relevant aspects of an illustration.

*Objects* have been used to illustrate Social Stories™. The benefit of objects is that they leave less meaning to chance. Fastening a plastic bag with grass clippings above a Story that applauds a child for helping with raking them, or posting a Social Story™ about brushing teeth (with toothpaste tube and toothbrush pasted to it) next to the bathroom sink makes clear connections between the text, and in these cases, the tasks that it describes. One drawback to objects is that they are potentially cumbersome, in some cases requiring a container to organize the Story and its assortment of three-dimensional "illustrations". Sometimes a portion of an object, or a miniature counterpart, is utilized. For example, instead of a large box of Cheerios™ to illustrate a breakfast story, the front of an individual size Cheerios™ box is cut out and pasted in the story. To "illustrate" the breakfast routine, a dollhouse dining room set and play family are used to "act out" the daily sequence of events. Other objects used to illustrate Stories include (though are definitely not limited to) dress-ups, puppets, and dolls. For a child who does not assign representative meaning to drawings or photographs, objects as illustrations may be a valuable tool.

*PowerPoint™* provides a wide variety of fun and interesting illustration options. Coupled with the high attraction that computers hold for many children, the use of this technology to further tailor and demonstrate meaning holds incredible potential. Color or animation can be used to draw attention to the most relevant cues, or words can move from the text of the Story to become part of the illustration to build comprehension. For an example, go online to: http://www.thegraycenter.org/power_point_social_stories.htm. There, the Story, *What does it mean to run out?* (seen in Figure 3, page 12) has been enhanced using PowerPoint. It was created on Microsoft Office XP™ and will run with animation, totally on its own with compatible equipment ("pages" turn automatically; do not click to change the slides). The many possibilities of PowerPoint as an illustration medium simply lead from one "click" to another, and hold promise for additional tailoring of information to a child's ability, learning style, and interests.
Selecting a Method of Illustration  Several factors determine the selection of illustrations for a Social Story™. Similar to choosing appropriate text, it's important to match illustrations to a child's ability and interests. For example:

a. Does the child have the prerequisite skills and understanding to make connections between the text and type of illustration?
b. Has the child previously demonstrated interest in this type of illustration?
c. Is a combination of materials the best illustration method for this child? For example, Ashley loves photos of herself. Photos of Ashley can be incorporated into the drawings used to illustrate her Stories.

Considering the pros and cons of each basic type of illustration helps us make a selection that will match a child's needs, abilities, and interests. There's at least one other form of illustration. In some cases, a child may want to illustrate his/her own Story, an activity that has positive potential - as well as some pitfalls. Our guidance as parents and professionals is very important when a child picks up a crayon, paintbrush, or pencil to illustrate his/her own Social Story™.

Children as Illustrators  As a consultant, I am often asked if it is advisable to incorporate a child's drawings into a Social Story™. Their use can yield real benefits. For example, Emma likes postage stamps. She draws a stamp that complements the text on each page of her Social Story™. The task is fueled by Emma's enthusiasm and increases her interest in the text and comprehension of the story. The process motivates her to apply the information to "real" situations and new contexts. If all continues to proceed like this, Emma is happy and the parent or professional who wrote the Story is very lucky. In reality, it may not be this easy or simple.

There may be an unforeseen drawback to using a child's drawings to illustrate a Social Story™. Several years ago, I had the opportunity to work with Brent, 6 years old. Brent had self-determination skills of someone 10 times his age. He was fascinated by Brent Stories. (As Brent explained, "They aren't Social Stories™ because they are not written for someone named Social, are they?" I called them Brent Stories without argument.) Brent also was self-appointed as illustrator for these Stories, a position he decided needed no advice or help from anyone. I learned with record speed that Brent had his own impermeable ideas. As the person who developed Social Stories™, I found myself scrambling to retain the integrity of the approach while it was held in the firm grasp of this determined little fellow.

Children interested in using their own drawings in a Social Story™ are likely to need adult guidance. Consider Emma and Brent, for example. Halfway through the project, Emma begins to develop incredibly detailed and colorful stamps... that unfortunately have absolutely no connection with the text. Brent, on the other hand, has an exclusive fondness for his ideas that renders my suggestions to the category of "Auditory Irritations". In terms of working with young illustrators, Brent taught me to provide the child with as much control as possible while guiding the task of illustration from the start. Emma, on the other hand,
taught me to build myself into the illustration process, and stay involved until it is finished. It’s important to structure the task and monitor progress to ensure effective illustrations and a successful experience for child illustrators.

**Illustrations: A case example** A case example summarizes and concludes our discussion of illustrations in Social Stories™. Trevor, 7 years old, is an intelligent second grader who takes pride in his favorite toys (including stuffed animals, trucks, Legos™, computer games, etc.), and his extensive comic book collection. He becomes intensely distressed when any one of them is misplaced. Mom and Dad report that even on occasions where they have been present at the time, their son does not seem to understand the benefit of sharing his situation with them, or even recognition of their willingness to help. A Social Story™ is developed using a format and illustrations tailored to Trevor’s ability and likely to recruit his interest, to describe the process of securing help from others to search for misplaced items (Figure 3).

Building from Trevor’s interest in comics, Trevor’s Story is structured like a comic strip. A series of four frames, similar to pages of a story, each contain text and a corresponding Clip Art illustration. The first frame identifies the topic: people can help Trevor find lost items (like teddy bears) The second and third frames explain that people know how to help, and how they can help by aiding in the search. The Story concludes in the last frame, referring back to the Story topic: People can help me look for my toy.

Trevor’s Story employs two helpful “tricks of the trade”. First, to encourage generalization, the text is kept general or “generic”, and the illustrations are used to depict a specific example, the loss of Trevor’s teddy bear. Future Stories may be subsequently developed from this one by simply replacing the teddy bear in the illustrations with other toys or items, like Legos™ or a comic book. By altering the illustrations in the cartoon and keeping the text the same, basic concepts in a Story can be applied to a variety of situations while the words remains familiar, predictable, and general. In Trevor’s case, it’s advisable to depict the loss of less upsetting items first (teddy bear), gradually building up to those that are more significant (comic book). Second, since this is an upsetting topic for Trevor, arrows with a toy truck encourage him to “keep moving through” the steps to resolution.

Trevor’s Story is just one example of how illustrations in a Social Story™ merge with the text to build meaning and practical application of new concepts and skills. They may captivate a child’s interest, or create bridges between words, meaning, and understanding. Considering the pros and cons of each form of illustration helps us make a selection that is tailored to the child, in our effort to create an effective and enjoyable Social Story™.

**Figure 3:** Trevor’s Story using “generic” text to describe a basic problem-solving sequence, with a specific illustration and arrows to encourage Trevor to keep moving through the problem to resolution.
A Social Story™ title meets all applicable Social Story Criteria.

The title of a Social Story™ plays an important role. Right from the start, the title begins teaching by positively identifying the main topic in a style and format consistent with the text and illustrations that follow. The title is a child's first contact with a Story, a single representative of all the information that follows.

To create a title an author considers the criteria that define Social Stories™ and applies those that are relevant to its development. The result is a title that:

1) shares information, the topic or most important point of the Story;
2) may pose or announce answers to the most important "wh" question(s);
3) is written from a first or third person perspective;
4) uses positive language or announces something the child currently does well;
5) is easily understood and interesting to the audience; and
6) is sometimes accompanied by - or contained within - a small illustration to enhance its meaning.

The title is an integral part of a Social Story™, requiring the same care and consideration as the text and illustrations. In other words, a story that is written according to all of the Social Story Defining Criteria and Guidelines except for its negative or careless title, is not a Social Story™! Applying relevant defining criteria to the title ensures that it matches the patient, unassuming, and reassuring style of the Story that follows, and for that matter - all Social Stories™ developed by caring and concerned parents and professionals.

Summary

A Social Story™ describes a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses in a specifically defined style and format. Since their introduction early in 1991, it is that "specifically defined style and format" that has distinguished Social Stories™ from traditional children's literature, social scripts, or task analyses. This article has discussed the recently revised and expanded defining criteria that determine how each Social Story™ is developed (Figure 4).

Writing a Social Story™, especially the first few times, can be a little scary. For that reason, people who attend Social Story™ workshops write their first Story as part of a team to generate ideas, catch errors, and provide immediate feedback. The new Social Story Checklist (Appendix A) may be used to compare any story to the 10 defining characteristics. Teams may use the appendix to structure their feedback or to identify final revisions. The Social Story Checklist also makes it possible for those working individually to check their own work. A team is preferable, however, and parents and professionals are encouraged to seek feedback from others who have experience with the approach. It's interesting to note that a Social Story™ is at its best when we are social: demonstrating cooperation, problem solving, and effective social skills while developing its text and illustrations.

It is my hope that these newly reorganized and expanded defining criteria and guidelines will clearly establish what is - and is not - a Social Story™. This is important, not only in protecting the original quality and intent of Social Stories™, but also to provide a “ruler” against which stories will be measured when they are used in homes, schools, clinics, and research. A singular standard is the only way to share ideas related to Social Stories™. In addition, a clear definition is essential to exploring the efficacy of - and new directions for - this approach.
Figure 4: The criteria that define each Social Story™

1. Meaning: The purpose a Social Story™ serves social information with a patient and the key information it emphasizes. Social Stories™ may be created for a variety of goals, including improving social skills, enhancing communication, providing information on different topics, or any other purpose.

2. Structure: A Social Story™ has a clear structure that follows a logical progression of events. It begins with a problem or situation followed by a series of steps and a resolution. The structure is designed to help the reader understand the scenario and the steps needed to navigate it.

3. Language: The language used in a Social Story™ is clear and concise. It is written in plain language, avoiding complex vocabulary and technical jargon. The text is structured in a way that supports understanding and retention.

4. Visuals: Social Stories™ often include visual aids such as illustrations, charts, or diagrams to support the text. These visuals help readers to better understand the information and process the content more effectively.

5. Interactivity: Social Stories™ may include interactive elements such as questions, tasks, or reflections. These elements encourage active engagement and promote deeper understanding of the content.

6. Flexibility: Social Stories™ allow for flexibility in implementation and adaptation. They can be tailored to fit different needs and preferences, making them versatile tools for various applications.

7. Adaptability: Social Stories™ can be adapted to different contexts and situations. They can be modified to meet the specific needs of the audience, whether it is a classroom, a home, or a community setting.

8. Accessibility: Social Stories™ are designed to be accessible to all readers, including those with reading difficulties. They use simple language and clear structures to ensure that everyone can understand and benefit from the content.

9. Relevance: Social Stories™ are relevant to the lives of their readers. They address real-life situations and scenarios that readers may encounter, providing practical guidance and support.

10. Evaluation: Social Stories™ are evaluated for effectiveness. They are tested to ensure that they meet the intended goals and provide the desired outcomes.

If their brief history is any indication, Social Stories™ have a bright and busy future. In the thirteen years since their development, Social Stories™ have earned the affection and respect of parents and professionals - the people who write them the most! In addition, children have taken them to bed, and relied on them to negotiate their way through the day. By describing everything from how to brush your teeth to why flags randomly wave in the wind, Social Stories™ have charted previously undocumented territory - one Story at a time. Indirectly, they have subtly taught parents and professionals to stop and consider events and ideas from other perspectives - not only to write better Stories, but to build better relationships in their own lives as well. In the hands of creative and caring people who understand their origin and defining characteristics, Social Stories™ have likely just begun to demonstrate all that they can teach... to all of us.

References


Gray, B. (2004). The Social Story Formula. The author credits A. Barrett Gray, M.S.W., for revising what previously was referred to as The Social Story Ratio, into a simpler formula. Many thanks!


Gray, C. (1993-2004). A variety of Social Story workshops held throughout the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Scandinavia.


Appendix A: The Social Story Checklist

Directions: Compare your story to the list below, and check off all that apply.
If 1-10 describe the story you have developed, it's a Social Story™.

1. The story meaningfully shares social information with an overall patient and reassuring quality. (If this is a story teaching a new concept or skill, another is developed another to praise a child's positive qualities, behaviors, or achievements.)

2. The story has an introduction that clearly identifies the topic, a body that adds detail, and a conclusion that reinforces and summarizes the information.

3. The story provides answers to "wh" questions, describing the setting or context (WHERE), time-related information (WHEN), relevant people (WHO), important cues (WHAT), basic activities, behaviors, or statements (HOW), and the reasons or rationale behind them (WHY).

4. The story is written from a first person perspective, as though the child is describing the event (most often for a younger or more severely challenged child, or third person perspective, like a newspaper article (usually for a more advanced child, or an adolescent or adult).

5. The story uses positive language, omitting descriptions or references to challenging behaviors in favor of identifying positive responses.

6. The story is comprised of descriptive sentences (objective, often observable, statements of fact), with an option of any one or more of the following sentence types: perspective sentences (that describe the thoughts, feelings, and/or beliefs of other people); cooperative sentences (to explain what others will do in support of the child); directive sentences (that identify suggested responses or choices of responses to a given situation); affirmative sentences (that enhance the meaning of surrounding statements); and/or control sentences (developed by the child to help him/her recall and apply information in the story).

7. The story follows the Social Story Formula:

   \[
   \text{DESCRIBE (descriptive + perspective + cooperative + affirmative sentences)} \geq 2
   \]

   *DIRECT (directive + control sentences)

   *If there are no directive and/or control sentences, use 1 instead of 0 as the denominator.

8. The story matches the ability and interests of the audience, and is literally accurate (exception: if analogies and/or metaphors are used).

9. If appropriate, the story uses carefully selected illustrations that are meaningful for the child and enhance the meaning of the text.

10. The title of the story meets all applicable Social Story™ criteria.

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San Diego, CA  4/26/04 – (See contact info. for time and location)
With Ken Rubin: “Factoring Friendship Into the Lives of Children with Asperger’s Syndrome and HFA.”
Contact: Phone: 802-446-3601, www.Mapleleafcenter.com

Kettering, UK  6/7-8/04 – (See contact info. for times and location)  Keith Lovett, autism@autismuk.com

Columbia, SC  6/16-17/04 – (See contact info. for times and location)
“Improving the Social Equation in ASD’s: Social Stories, Friendship and Bullying.”
Contact: South Carolina Autism Society, Carol Niederhauser 800-438-4790, carol@scautism.org

Niles, OH  6/18-19/04 - (See contact info. for times, location, and topics covered)
NEOSERRC (Northwest Ohio Special Education Regional Resource Center)
Contact: Linda Saul, 800-776-8298, x105, mcoe_ls@ACCESS-K12.org

Lancaster, PA  6/22/04 – Ephrata Middle School (See contact info. for times)
Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13  Topics covered include “Friendship and Children with ASD” and
“Bullying and Children with ASD.”

Arlington, IL  6/24/04 – (See contact info. for times and location)
Presentation topic will be on Bullying.  Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization (NSSEO)
Contact: Barbara Hammes, 847-463-8147, bhammes@nsseo.org, nsseo.org.

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