Tip Sheet #9
Social Stories

What are social stories?
Social stories (Gray and Garand, 1993) teach children with autism the who, what, where, why, and how of social situations. In social stories, a series of text and pictures are read to a child at least once per day describing a social situation, stating the child’s and others’ perspectives on the social situation, and directing the child to engage in desirable behavior. Social stories are individualized for children and can be presented to children in books, on computers, and through song.

There are four types of statements in social stories:
1. **Descriptive statements** describe a social situation. For example, “In the play area, children play with toys” and “Sometimes other children play with Mr. Potatohead.”
2. **Perspective statements** indicate a child’s perspective of a social situation. For example, “I like to play with Mr. Potatohead.”
3. **Directive statements** indicate desired behavior to the child. For example, “When other children have Mr. Potatohead, I ask them for a turn and don’t grab it from them.”
4. **Affirmative statements** indicate the outcomes of engaging in the desired behavior. For example, “When I ask for a turn with my toys, my friends and teachers are happy.”

What types of skills can I teach using social stories?
Social stories can be used to teach social skills and decrease challenging behavior, including:
- Greeting peers
- Sharing toys
- Following instructions
- Initiating comments
- Decreasing tantrums
- Decreasing loud vocalizations
- Decreasing delayed echolalia

How do I write a social story?
Guidelines for writing social stories include:
- One statement and picture should appear on each page.
- There should be a ratio of one directive statement to every 2-5 descriptive, perspective, and affirmative statements.
- Language should be flexible such as using “usually” instead of “always.”

Social stories can be written either

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from the child’s point of view or from the point of view of a teacher, parent, or peer.

**How do I use the social story?**
Read the story to the child once per day during a neutral time.
Read the story right before the social situation is expected to occur, and following the social situation providing feedback on the child’s behavior.
After reading the social story to a child, do a comprehension check by asking the child questions about the story to ensure that he or she understands the story.

**Are there any prerequisites?**
The most important prerequisite for using social stories is that the child has the ability to follow directions.

**Are there any cautions?**
A possible caution is that a social story may not be effective as the only intervention. Other intervention components might be needed to supplement the social stories, such as modeling the desired behaviors and providing praise and feedback for engaging in the desired behaviors.

**References and Resources**
For more information on social stories, see Carol Gray’s website:
http://www.thegraycenter.org/


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