



# Social Stories

A simple way to help improve social understanding and reduce anxiety

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# Introduction

**Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray in 1990. They are short, specific narratives designed to help individuals, particularly those with autism, understand social situations, social skills, and appropriate behaviours.**

Social Stories aim to improve social understanding and reduce anxiety by explaining social situations, expectations, and appropriate responses in a simple, relatable way - almost like a step-by-step guide. Social Stories are most effective when they are personalised for your child and very often can help all children who might be anxious about certain situations.

Autistic children often need support to understand or pick up on social cues that other people notice – for example, body language, facial expressions, gestures and eye contact.

Social stories were developed to help autistic children learn about social situations in a way that makes sense to them. They present information in a more literal way that autistic children and others may find easier to understand.

If you would like to know more about social stories and their background:  
<https://carolgraysocialstories.com/social-stories/what-is-it/>

## Parent/carers often ask:

- What are social stories and how can I use them to support my child?



# Top tips and ideas

## **Social stories can help children:**

- pick up on cues they might not otherwise notice
- learn how to respond to these cues
- learn new skills
- manage anxiety or worries about social situations
- understand how to handle these situations

## **and help with:**

- understanding social norms and different concepts
- developing self-care skills – like cleaning teeth, washing hands or getting dressed
- improving social skills - like sharing, asking for help, saying thank you
- coping with changes to routine and unexpected or distressing events – like moving house, starting nursery or school, teacher being absent, mum being unwell, pet dying etc.

Social Stories can be used to prepare for events like going to the doctor, going to the supermarket, starting school, or learning new social skills or concepts. You can create a social story for almost any social situation, and they can be based on a particular area or situation of concern to your child.

## **How do I create a social story for my child?**

You can download 'standard' social stories and linked resources from lots of websites, including ELSA (weblink below).

Social Stories are most effective when they are personalised for your child, so you can edit the ones you download to include information that is specific to your child, for example a picture of their nursery or school or a different caregiver name. You can also edit the language used to make the story more suited to your child's level of understanding or add/remove information.

Carol Gray has created a list of 10 principles to guide you through writing a Social Story. Anyone can follow the principles and write a Social Story and Carol Gray herself says that parents write the best Social Stories.

# How to Write a Social Story: Step-by-Step

## 1. Decide What Kinds of Topics to Tackle in Your Social Story

The first thing you need to do is to identify the situation you'd like to cover in the social story – for example, a trip to the supermarket or grocery store. A social story should be written from the child's perspective – “I went to the supermarket” or “Oliver went to the supermarket”.

## 2. Prepare the Story

Decide what you want to cover in the story and make ‘bullet point’ notes. Take photos or gather pictures. You can download some images from some of the websites listed in the list below.

## 3. Vary Your Sentence Types

Carol Gray recommends that social stories should use both descriptive and “coaching” sentences. Ideally, you should have at least two descriptive sentences for every coaching sentence. Descriptive sentences can be further broken down into factual, perspective, cooperative, and affirmative sentences.

Many people find it helpful to write one descriptive sentence followed by a directive/coaching sentence, then a cooperative and affirmative sentence.

### Here is an example:

*Descriptive Sentence:* I go to the supermarket to get food.

*Perspective Sentence:* Sometimes I get upset when I go to the supermarket because it is loud and crowded.

*Directive/Coaching Sentence:* I can put on my headphones and listen to music when I feel upset in the supermarket.

*Affirmative Sentence:* Staying calm in the supermarket is good for me.

## Top tips for effective social stories:

- Use photographs relevant to the child and situation.
- Keep the language clear and simple.
- Include all key steps.
- Read regularly so they become familiar, especially during the activity or transition they find challenging to understand or participate in.

# How to Write a Social Story: Step-by-Step (continued)

## 4. Add Some Pictures

Next, you will need to add some pictures to the story. Put the picture above the text so there is a clear link between the picture and the sentence. The pictures should be clear and represent the meaning of the story – if you can, use actual photographs of the child and the chosen situation – e.g. a photo of your child in your local supermarket.

## 5. Read the story, practice and give feedback

Set aside plenty of time to read the story to the child. Read through the story several times and have the child join in if possible.

**Reinforce with role play:** After reading the story several times, consider role-playing to help further your child's understanding of the expectations, using positive feedback when your child displays the expected behaviour after the social story is used.

**Re-visit:** Don't throw the stories out when you think you might be finished with them. Hang on to them and keep them accessible so you can reread, revisit as needed and practice more if necessary.

The image shows a social story titled "When I'm Frustrated" with a copyright notice for Communication by Mayerson Johnson Rights Reserved. The story includes several paragraphs of text, each accompanied by small illustrations. The text describes the child's feelings of frustration, the consequences of acting out, and the strategies used to manage these feelings. The story concludes with the child using words to express their frustration.

**When I'm Frustrated**  
Frustrated, Silly, Cross  
– Use a word that child

Sometimes I get really frustrated and mad.

I want to throw things, hit people, yell, and cry.

If I act that way I can get in trouble and people won't want to be my friend.

When I am frustrated, I need to take a deep breath. I can ask for a break, take a walk, get a drink of water, or put my head down.

I tell people around me, "I am frustrated right now." I use my words. Soon I will feel better.

**An example Social Story**

## Social Stories Video

By Dingley's Promise Training

[www.vimeo.com/947419595](http://www.vimeo.com/947419595)

The video thumbnail features the title "Social Stories" and a list of bullet points: "Share expectations of the setting", "Share daily routines", and "Be used as an alternative to the activity the children working towards". A play button icon is overlaid on the text. The Dingley's Promise logo is visible in the bottom right corner.

**Social Stories**

- Share expectations of the setting
- Share daily routines
- Be used as an alternative to the activity the children working towards

Dingley's Promise

# Useful sources of information and support

## Useful sources of information and support on toilet training and continence

### Social Stories:

Range of resources and social stories templates and images:

- [www.elsa-support.co.uk/category/free-resources/](http://www.elsa-support.co.uk/category/free-resources/)
- [www.autismlittlelearners.com/social-stories-for-school/](http://www.autismlittlelearners.com/social-stories-for-school/)
- [www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/social-stories](http://www.twinkl.co.uk/resources/social-stories)

**The Sheffield NHS website** has some helpful tips on adapting social stories for your own child: [www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/child-development-and-neurodisability/autism-home/autism-support/social-stories/](http://www.sheffieldchildrens.nhs.uk/services/child-development-and-neurodisability/autism-home/autism-support/social-stories/)

A useful summary of social stories particularly helpful for your child's nursery setting to use can be found on the **Dingley's Promise** website at: [www.dingley.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Social-Stories.pdf](http://www.dingley.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Social-Stories.pdf)

**The National Autistic Society** is a charity that supports families - their advice and guidance section has a lot of useful information about autism - [www.autism.org.uk/](http://www.autism.org.uk/)

## ABSS SEND Family Resources

This Tip Sheet has been compiled as part of the A Better Start Southend (ABSS) Legacy, with the support of local partners and families – for other useful resources visit the ABSS website using the link below.



Visit the [ABSS Family Resources Page](http://www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/family-resources)  
[www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/family-resources](http://www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/family-resources)



# Jargon Buster

## **ASD/C**

Autistic Spectrum Disorder / Condition

## **Neurodiversity**

Neurodiversity is a framework for understanding how people think, learn, and behave. Most people are neurotypical, meaning their brains function as expected by society. However, it's estimated that around 1 in 7 people are neurodivergent. Neurodiversity covers a wide range of conditions, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, and autism.



## City Family



City Family is a local organisation that takes the good practice from A Better Start Southend (ABSS) and weaves it into their support services for local families. They connect parents and carers to support, services, and community networks, making family life a little easier. Whether you need advice, activities, or access to more specialist support, they can help you. Whatever your journey, you're not alone.

If you have any questions or concerns around family services in Southend, or need support, please contact City Family's Information and Guidance Service where their Navigators will be able to help you.

- **Call:** 01702 844188
- **WhatsApp/Live Chat:** 07507 242398
- **Email:** [yfsouthend@cityfamily.org.uk](mailto:yfsouthend@cityfamily.org.uk)
- **or visit** [www.cityfamily.org.uk](http://www.cityfamily.org.uk)

You can also visit City Family's Service Map to explore services available to families across the city of Southend. [www.cityfamily.org.uk/search/](http://www.cityfamily.org.uk/search/)



Visit City Family's website for more information

[www.cityfamily.org](http://www.cityfamily.org)





## A Better Start Southend

A Better Start Southend (ABSS) was at the heart of early years support for families in Southend from 2015 until March 2025.



### ABSS delivered services that helped families:

- improve how they communicate with their little ones
- build social and emotional skills
- live healthier lives

As part of the legacy from ABSS, local partner organisations and parents worked closely with ABSS to assemble a range of resource packs for families and for practitioners who support families. This Information Sheet forms part of those resources.



[Learn more about the ABSS Family Resource Packs](https://www.abetterstartsouthend.co.uk/family-resources)

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