Social stories

Information for schools, parents and carers

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Who?

Social stories have been found to be effective for children with Social Communication Difficulties. Each social story can be adapted to meet the needs of the child.

What?

A social story is a brief description of a social situation. When a child is having difficulties with a social situation, social stories can provide a guide for the child to follow. Examples of behavioural targets could include: knowing the appropriate behaviour when lining up, coping with change, using eye contact appropriately etc.

When?

Ideally the child should have the opportunity to read or listen to the story on a daily basis. It may be beneficial for the child to have the story kept on their desk. It often takes time for the child to get used to reading their story every day. However, once reading the story becomes part of their routine, further alternative social stories can be created to address other issues.

How?

Social stories are composed of four different types of sentences: descriptive, perspective, directive and control sentences.

1. Descriptive sentences

Describe what is happening in the situation and why e.g. ‘When a child is sitting on the carpet and wants to ask the teacher something they put their hand up’.

2. Perspective sentences

Give students insight into feelings of others in the situation e.g. ‘My teacher will be please when I put up my hand because she can hear each child speak without other children interrupting’.

3. Directive sentences

Tell the student what is expected of them as a response to the situation (written in first person) e.g. ‘When I want to say something to my teacher I will try to put my hand up when I am sitting on the carpet area’.

4. Control sentences

Are written with the student and they identify strategies which the student will use to recall relevant information e.g. ‘I will try to remember to put up my hand by looking at the picture card in front of me’.

The descriptive and perspective sentences should outnumber the directive and control sentences. This ensures that the student gains enough information about the social situation and is not overloaded with desirable responses or appropriate strategies.

When using directive sentences, it is useful to phrase them ‘I will work on….‘ or ‘I will try to ….‘ rather than ‘I will’ or ‘I should’.

Why?

Social stories can be particularly effective for a number of reasons. They:

- Can teach routines.
- Address a wide variety of behaviours.
- Present information in a non-threatening format.
- Can be used for non-readers by presenting the story visually, or by recording on a cassette.