



Pictured above: Dave and his dog, Bingo.

Carol's Club

*Custom Social Stories™ Resources
Created by Carol Gray for Members*

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SOCIAL STORIES

Is "Why People Brush Their Teeth" a Social Article? Adults and Toothbrushing

Tanya initiated this Project. Tanya recently attended my Houston two-day Social Story workshop and would like feedback on her initial attempt at writing Social Stories and Articles. Tanya has written her first three Social Articles for her adult son with autism, Dave, age twenty. I will be providing her with ideas for all of her Articles. This Project focuses on "Why People Brush Their Teeth" with applicability to all of our hygiene routines.

The Project

It's great to see Social Articles "coming into their own!" Social Articles are the lesser known form of Social Stories. They are most often developed for pre-teens through adults, with content, vocabulary, font style and size, and illustration in line with the abilities and interests of a more advanced audience. The first Social Article, "Gray's Guide to Compliments" was published in the Jenison Public Schools journal, "The Morning News" on February 15, 1999. Social Articles finally earned a chapter in the most recent 15th Anniversary Edition of "The New Social Story Book," published by Future Horizons (Gray, 2015). Later this year, Dr. Siobhan Timmins will publish, "Successful Social Articles Into Adulthood (For people on the autism spectrum)," the second book of Social Articles in her "Growing Up With Social Stories" book series (Jessica Kingsley Publishers, in press). (See Appendix A for additional ideas from Siobhan related to our topic.) Historically the demand for Social Articles has always exceeded their availability. Their increasing numbers of are long overdue.

Each Social Story workshop emphasizes the importance of gathering information before identifying a specific topic and developing a Social Story or Social Article. It became quickly apparent in talking with Tanya that parents have a wealth of information by the time an offspring approaches adulthood! Whereas a teacher or clinician writing a Social Story begins by gathering information about the person in their care and the topic area, parents start the Social Story process with an in-depth understanding of their child. To begin work on a Social Article about why people brush their

teeth, Tanya already knows her son and his toothbrushing history. She needs only to gather information about toothbrushing.

In contrast, to complete this Project I needed to learn more about Tanya's son. Dave is currently finishing up culinary classes that he is auditing at a community college. He works with a "job coach," a teacher in the eighteen-plus program thru the school district. As a part of that program, Dave volunteered at Goodwill. The teacher is currently working with him twice a week on daily skills, answering emails, texting, and exploring the local area by walking the neighborhood to local stores. David also is working with Texas Workforce Solutions - formally the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DARS). They just completed some vocational and neuropsychological testing to determine his work potential and how they can help him gain job skills. Dave loves his dog, Bingo. He also likes roller coasters (including riding them!) and Hot Fries, a spicy chip-type product.

Dave has at least two cavities with each check-up, twice a year. With each visit, the staff reminds Dave of the benefits of regular toothbrushing. According to Dave, it's the toothpaste that's the problem. He will brush a few seconds and spit it out. Over the years, Tanya has tried several interventions and strategies. Most recently, Dave selected an organic non-foaming cinnamon-flavored toothpaste.

First, I'll answer Tanya's initial question: Is "Why People Brush Their Teeth?" a Social Article. Tanya's original draft appears below with my comments inserted in italics, followed by a revised Article and additional ideas, including a letter from Dr. Siobhan Timmons (Appendix A).

Why People Brush Their Teeth

I like the title! It's direct, to the point, and consistent with the subsequent content.

A toothbrush is an oral hygiene instrument that is used to clean teeth, gums, and tongue. In the history of toothbrushing, people used chew sticks, tree twigs, feathers, and animal bones to clean their teeth. The modern toothbrush was made in China out of hog bristles and later horsetail hairs attached to oxbone handles. Toothbrushes were being mass produced by 1840 in several countries. In the United States, toothbrushing became routine after WW II when soldiers were required to clean their teeth daily. Nylon bristles and thermoplastic materials along with angled toothbrushes are now common. In 2003 the toothbrush was selected as the number one invention that Americans could not live without. Many people perform toothbrushing as an important part of their oral hygiene.

This is a good start with interesting facts. Facts in print have influence; there's nothing like having a piece of information that is true and undebatable. Historical facts are even better! They are no longer open to revision and can't possibly change. Using facts in a Social Story or Article is right in line with their goal as unbiased and accurate documents. Some ideas might be expanded or used later in the article. For example, how might it feel to use a

branch or bones as a toothbrush? The size of the font may be a large for some Audiences. Tanya indicates that it is perfect for Dave. This is a judgment made according to individual factors.

Many people brush their teeth to get them clean and have fresh smelling breath. Having clean teeth removes bacteria and is a healthy habit. Having healthy teeth will prevent problems such as gingivitis, cavities, and larger health issues such as heart problems and teeth loss. Teeth loss can cost a lot of money, pain, and prevent people from eating certain favorite foods.

In the paragraph above, I like how the facts continue with a focus on the topic at hand. So far, this is reading like a Social Article! Edit for literalness in the final draft. For example, interpreted at face value clean teeth don't remove bacteria, brushing teeth with a toothbrush and toothpaste do that. And having clean teeth helps to keep them healthy and free of gingivitis and cavities. Regular toothbrushing also helps to prevent tooth loss and other health issues, like heart disease. We may create stronger causal links between the ideas mentioned as well.

People also brush their teeth because of other people. For many people, having food on their teeth is uncomfortable. Brushing their teeth makes them feel clean and fresh and can make them feel comfortable again. Since many people feel toothbrushing and clean teeth make them feel comfortable, just being around someone who has dirty teeth or bad smelling breath makes them uncomfortable. Sometimes people perform tasks because it makes other people feel comfortable. People may not want to make friends with someone who often has dirty teeth, or bad smelling breath. By brushing my teeth, people around me may want to be my friend.

There are some repeated ideas here. One suggestion is to take the first sentence of the previous paragraph and place it here. That creates a paragraph about the connection between toothbrushing and oral and general health first, followed by a paragraph about the social reasons for toothbrushing. To help maintain Dave's interest and attention, positively state the last two sentences in a final summary paragraph and keep statements in the third person.

I'm impressed by Tanya's efforts! Writing a Social Article has its unique challenges, and she has done a beautiful job of pulling many ideas together. Tanya's draft deviates here and there from the ten criteria that define Social Articles, but it provides a sound foundation for a final draft.

Recently while driving I saw a blank white billboard. In the middle was one sentence, small compared to the size of the billboard: "You should brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day." Over the years, I've strayed from that advice. The billboard has had an interesting impact on my behavior. Since seeing that simple message alongside the road, I've purchased a one-minute sand timer for the bathroom. I have been brushing my teeth for a full two minutes twice each day. I think it was the simplicity of the message that made it stick with me. Wondering if there may be "something to that" for those of us who write Social Stories and Articles, I've incorporated the simple billboard strategy into the Social Article that follows.

Below is "Why People Brush Their Teeth" by Tanya and Carol. I've made changes to the original draft in line with my comments, writing style, and I've added text to acknowledge Dave's dislike of toothpaste, and his love of roller coasters. In place of photo illustrations, I've inserted subtitles into a few billboards. The best font for Dave would be larger. I've used smaller text to save space and I've provided Tanya with a version with larger text. Keep in mind, in no way am I assuming this is the best or final Social Article for Dave. It's an Article on the same topic and Tanya may pull ideas from it as she makes final edits to create a final draft tailored to Dave.

Why People Brush Their Teeth

People have been brushing their teeth since about 3000 B.C. People used to use chew sticks, tree twigs, feathers, and animal bones to clean their teeth. The first toothbrushes were made in China out of hog bristles. A later version used horsetail hairs attached to oxbone handles. By 1840, toothbrushes were mass produced in several countries. In the United States, toothbrushing became routine after World War II when soldiers were required to clean their teeth each day. Today, toothbrushes are made with nylon bristles and thermoplastic materials. In 2003, the toothbrush was selected as the number one invention that Americans could not live without. This article explains why toothbrushing is so important.

People brush their teeth to stay healthy

There are more than 300 different species of bacteria in every mouth and about a billion of them at any point in time. Some bacteria are safe and okay, even good for people; other bacteria are not. Unhelpful bacteria make a film on teeth called dental plaque. Dental plaque can cause cavities. When plaque builds up near the gum it can cause gingivitis and periodontal disease. Gingivitis is a swelling of the gums. Periodontal disease is decay of the bones and tissues that keep the teeth tight and in place. Oral diseases may lead to heart disease, too. Food particles in the mouth make it possible for bacteria to grow and spread fast, to flourish. The longer the food particles stay and are not brushed away, the more bacteria multiply.

There aren't many people who enjoy brushing their teeth. Some people don't like the feel of the toothbrush. Others don't like the taste of the toothpaste. And then there's the group of people who would just rather be doing something else. Doing anything else while brushing teeth is difficult. So why do people keep trying to find a way to brush their teeth? Toothbrushing helps to remove food particles and fight bacteria, which helps to prevent cavities, gingivitis, and periodontal disease. People like to be comfortable, oral diseases are uncomfortable, so people brush their teeth to stay healthy. Most people would rather brush their teeth than lose them, which is why they keep working with their dentist, family, job coaches, instructors, or close friends to find a toothbrushing method that works for them.

People brush their teeth for their friends, families, and others.

People also brush their teeth because of other people. Many people feel uncomfortable when their teeth need to be brushed. Toothbrushing makes breath fresh again. Fresh breath is minty, pleasant, or has no scent at all. "Bad breath" refers to breath with an unpleasant odor. As people grow into adulthood, they begin doing things like taking a bath or brushing their teeth - not only for their own health and comfort, but also for the comfort of others around them.

When people know they are going to be with other people, like co-workers, family or friends, they often take a few minutes beforehand to "get ready." Getting ready is also called "freshening up" and may include taking a shower or putting on clean clothes. It often includes toothbrushing. Getting ready means doing things so others are comfortable around them; a friendly and respectful thing to do.

Two minutes twice a day.

Many people, including adults, could improve their toothbrushing habits. For example, it is recommended that people brush their teeth for two minutes two times a day. Two minutes may seem like quite a long time until the number of bacteria (one billion) in the human mouth is considered. Two minutes can be spent in many ways. The average roller coaster ride is about two minutes. It takes two minutes for a person to walk a tenth of a mile. There's a two-minute website, donothingfortwominutes.com which is far more difficult to complete than brushing teeth for the same amount of time.

Toothbrushing is important to health and the comfort of others. It's an important way to spend four minutes a day.

In Closing

I'm continuing work on this Project. I am wondering if a two-minute video of a roller coaster ride to accompany Dave's toothbrushing might help. This one is on YouTube, one minute and fifty-three seconds long: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vduLSrkKco. I tried it myself. Beats my one-minute sand timer! I've discovered some ideas online in a search of "alternatives to toothpaste." Of course, run these ideas past your dentist for his or her opinion. Tanya and I both welcome ideas from other Carol's Club members. Your help will be most appreciated.

Appendix A

In the course of researching this Project, I contacted Siobhan Timmins, my friend and Social Story colleague, to recruit ideas. I sent her a copy of Tanya's original draft and basic background information about our topic. Siobhan lives in England, so my communication was via email. The thing about email is that it heads to an online address, unlike posted letters which head to one physical location on the planet. I didn't know Siobhan is currently on vacation in the Isles of Scilly! Sounds fabulous! What blew me away was Siobhan's quick and detailed response. I was so impressed that I haven't edited a word. I did insert, "The Article went something like this." That's it. From the Isles of Scilly (where is that, anyway?):

Hi Carol,

I am in the Isles of Scilly on holiday at the moment and away from my file of old Stories and Articles! The young man I wrote for had oral hypersensitivity and refused to brush his teeth because of the discomfort. All the usual information had not connected with him (keeping others comfortable, having a healthy smile, having strong teeth etc) despite several Social Stories over the years. Your young man may not yet have had that information shared with him in a Story or Article and if so the information contained in his mother's article will be essential I am sure.

The Article went something like this:

Dentists usually advise their patients to have good dental hygiene. This means brushing the teeth twice a day with a toothbrush and tooth paste. Good dental hygiene is known to maintain gum and tooth health preventing both tooth decay and the gum disease that leads to tooth loss. When teeth are lost sometimes the texture of foods eaten often has to be softened because the ability to munch and chew diminishes. For some this means a favourite food cannot be eaten.

For many people toothbrushing is easy and comfortable to do. Others have oral hypersensitivity which means that toothbrushing may be uncomfortable and therefore less easy for them. Dentists know about oral hypersensitivity. They have therefore developed specific sudless and flavourless toothpastes and specific soft bristle tooth brushes and finger brushes to help people with oral hypersensitivity brush their teeth more comfortably. It is important to brush the teeth to help avoid dental treatment and tooth loss.

Dentists advise that people with hypersensitivity develop toothbrushing in small gentle steps to allow the mouth to get used to each sensation and feeling. The steps are:

- 1. Use finger brush across teeth and gums gently for 20 seconds then 30 seconds building up to 2 minutes*
- 2. Use finger brush across teeth and gums firmly for 20 seconds then 30 seconds building up to 2 minutes*
- 3. Use flavourless tooth paste on finger brush first gently then firmly for 20, 30 40 50 second building up to 2 minutes*
- 4. Use soft brush across teeth and gums gently for 20 seconds then 30 seconds building up to 2 minutes*

5. Use flavourless tooth paste on soft brush across teeth and gums firmly for 20 seconds then 30 seconds building up to 2 minutes

I really cannot remember how it finished though!

Perhaps a short film from a GoPro camera recording of a rollercoaster ride may help him persist in the timings?

My young man also really liked wildlife and connected with the fact that animal's lives were shortened by loss of teeth when they were unable to eat. Discussion around that was another angle to reinforce the importance of dental hygiene in a low-key kind of way. An old dogs breath is a useful practical example, along with the softening of their foodstuffs as their dentition fails.

I definitely think a dentist could introduce this Article. His clinical authority could underpin the Article, which could be formatted like a dental report article. Of course, that will depend if they young man respects the professional opinion of the dentist or rejects all things connected with dentistry!

Hope this helps, sorry I cannot find the original! Am happy for you to use anything you find remotely useful in the above!

All the best

Siobhan