THE MORNING NEWS

Jenison Public Schools

Summer '98

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.

THE MORNING NEWS

A publication of Jenison Public Schools, Michigan
May 1998, Volume 10, Number 2

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.

The Social Story Edition

Complete in two issues: Spring and Summer 1998

Articles and ideas related to
Social Stories and related instructional techniques.

Featuring a special rip-out section:
The Advanced Social Story Workbook

About Our Cover:

On our cover is a story board titled, "Davis Farm Story" by Kelly Campbell. Kelly is a special education teacher at West Broad Street School in Pawcatuck, Connecticut. She uses social stories, and story boards like the one on our cover, to help students anticipate new and unfamiliar situations. "Davis Farm Story" was written prior to a field trip.

The illustrations on our cover are from the Picture Communication Symbols books by Roxanna Mayer Johnson M.A., C.C.C. and illustrated by Roxanna Mayer Johnson, Suzanna Mayer Watt, Laura Engle, and Diane Huneke. THE MORNING NEWS wishes to thank the Mayer-Johnson Co. for their permission to reprint Picture Communication Symbols on our cover and in the article by Anne Marie Johnson, M.Ed. (pp.5-7). Picture Communication Symbols have been used to illustrate thousands of social stories and materials, providing a valued educational resource for parents and professionals. For more information about Picture Communication Symbols, contact the Mayer-Johnson Co. at P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA 92075-1579. Phone: 619-550-0084, Fax: 619-550-0449.

Contents

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Address all c igh School,
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Carol Gray, Editc ogo: Janet Williams.

A real person

- Gunilla Gerland

Reprinted with permission from *Communication: The Magazine of The National Autistic Society*
London, England Spring 1997

Editor's note: *Gunilla Gerland is 33 years old and from Sweden. She is also autistic. Here is a translation of a speech she originally gave at a 1996 autism conference in Sweden.*

My name is Gunilla Gerland and I have an autistic disability.

I'm here to talk about my autistic traits and the book I've written about myself and my life. The name of the book is *A real person* and that is what I've always tried to be but never felt like.

I've always wanted to become 'normal' or 'ordinary' or whatever I should call this, and therefore I've watched ordinary people closely. And during all these years I've learnt a lot about how they think...

So my guess is that right now you are all looking at me and trying to find something odd or strange in my behaviour. But you can't really come up with something. And some of you may think that since I seem so 'normal' to you, I therefore am 'normal'. Well, life isn't so simple.

The fact that so called normal people, or whatever I should call them, have thought that they know exactly how all human beings function, has been one of the harmful things in my life: that those people have had a model, into which they have tried to fit me. And that they also have been absolutely convinced that this model of theirs is the only existing model.

That's why they've told me to behave myself, and not to be different. They have never imagined that I would function differently from them, and they have never been able to guess what I felt. Lack of empathy or what?!

But I hope that all of you sitting here today, already know that there isn't only one model. Maybe someone would want to use what I'm saying to make up a model into which all high-functioning autistic people should fit. But if you want to make such a model, you must remember that we don't all have the same needs or even want to be treated in the same way.

It is in fact true that we who have autistic traits show sameness in our ways of thinking and behaving. And you can test us and see this sameness on a piece of paper. But all of you also show a sameness in your way of thinking and behaving. And no-one would ever think that you all needed or wanted the same thing.

"The world seemed totally incomprehensible to me"

When I was a kid, I was not at all interested in other people; I didn't know what they were for. The world seemed totally incomprehensible to me, and I almost always felt confused.

I thought - and still do when I don't stop and think - that people meant what they said. I myself always said exactly what I meant. It seems so obvious that that's how things should be!

So to me it's not the big misunderstandings, the ones you read about in books on autism, that has been most difficult. Like for example misinterpreting 'Give me your hands' and think they want you to chop them off.

What has been very confusing and often hurtful are the more subtle ones, the ones that no-one ever could explain. Like when someone says 'It's getting better' or 'Of course you will get that job', and I thought this meant that they actually knew this. I thought they couldn't possibly put the words this way if they didn't know this for sure.

So I came to the conclusion that they could look into the future in some strange way.

Another thing that sometimes has led to misunderstandings is the way I see colours. I have always had colours inside me. Things that people have said and how they say it, the intonation, has always become colours inside of me. The people themselves are colours too. And I have always tried to use the colours to understand the world. When two things produced the same colour inside of me, I thought of it as a connection between these two things.

There is a word for sensing colours like this, it's called synesthesia and is not very unusual. What may be unusual though is that whenever I lacked reliable information from my other senses, I trust synesthesia. It has cut both ways. Sometimes it made me misunderstand and misinterpret the world, but sometimes it has made me discover real connections long before others could see them.

My eyesight has always seemed very sharp and special to me. This is hard to describe and I think it's best done by reading a part from my book.

"There was something different with the way I saw things. My sight was somewhat flat; it felt two-dimensional and that affected the way I perceived rooms and people.

It was as if I had to go to my eyes to pick up the sight, as if I manually had to take the picture to the brain, it didn't just come to me. My sight did not give me an automatic focus on what I saw, it all seemed to have the same sharpness.

The world looked like a photograph, and that had consequences. For example I didn't know that the houses I saw on our street had an inside.

My sight gave me the image of everything as if it was cut out of cardboard. Yet I knew that our house had an inside volume, but I didn't link this to the house next to ours. That house was flat as an advertisement sign.

I perceived the people, the empty faces, that I sometimes saw in the gardens that surrounded the houses, as extensions of my view of the house. It never occurred to me that they could be people who actually lived there, like my family lived in my house."

I also had obsessions and ritualistic and compulsive behaviour when I was a kid, and it almost always had to do with something curved. It's hard to explain but I felt I needed those curved things and many times it was a way to handle a very unpleasant feeling I had in my back and my neck. It was as if I had some sort of shiver inside my spine, it was always creeping in there. It felt like torture. One way of holding that feeling back, was touching different things.

I can see that there's a logic in compulsive behaviour when you suffer from something that is permanent and unbearable.

I think that totally non-autistic people maybe also would behave that way, if you put them through the kind of inside torture. But of course I don't know this, and I don't know if other people with autism felt the same way as I did. They could have different reasons for behaving compulsively.

What doesn't apply to me is the theory I've seen in some books on autism - that compulsive behaviour comes from the need to control a world of chaos.

"I have never understood why experts have such a difficulty with admitting that 'we don't know anything about this."

This theory strikes me as the usual one and only model thinking, which you use when you can't find the right explanation. I have never understood why experts have such a difficulty with admitting that 'we don't know anything about this, we'll see if we'll find the answers in the future'.

While I was writing this book it became more obvious to me how logical my behaviour was, that almost every behaviour which was looked upon as strange or different (and therefore irritating), was in fact very logical.

For instance I had these tantrums when I used to scream, bite, kick and throw things around.

And when I was writing about these tantrums it struck me that if you put any non-autistic person in a position where he/she, year after year felt misunderstood, and he/she misinterpreted the world, and had difficulties in communicating this, then he/she might also start to throw things around.

This does not mean that I think you could make a person autistic this way, it only means that things may be less odd than they seem to be.

I was diagnosed as an adult, and that happened when my disability was less obvious than it had been.

Until I was diagnosed I always tried hard to be like everyone else. Now I'm a lot more like everyone than I ever have been, but now I'm not so sure that this is what I want.

"I discovered how hard it is to be a grown up with this disability"

So now I've tried to acquire a disability awareness and make this a part of me. This is when I discovered how hard it is to be a grown-up with this disability. You aren't expected to exist.

I went to a lecture on Asperger syndrome last fall, and while I was paying the fee I was asked: 'Are you a parent or a professional?' Well, how can I answer that question? This may seem like nothing to you, but it is important to me.

Books and lectures on autism often produce the same feeling - that autistic people cease to exist when they've left high school.

And if we sometimes, in spite of this, do exist, we are not expected to take an interest in what research says about our disability. This feeling of no-one recognising your existence is really sad.

Gunilla's book, A real person, has been translated into English and was published in Autumn 1997 by Souvenir Press.

Editor's note: THE MORNING NEWS has been asked to forward this information with the understanding that Jenison Public Schools does not endorse and is not sponsoring this study.

Reprinted with permission from *The MAAP*, Volume II, 1998

HELP MAKE A BETTER TOMORROW FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM: Participate in a NIH Research Study TODAY

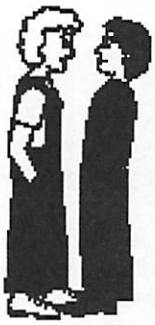
Did you know that today's diagnosis, detection, and interventions are the result of yesterday's research studies? **Do you know that what will be available in five years for your young child or your adult child depends on today's research studies?** Please take time to participate in the new federally funded research studies now. No one can do this but you. Don't be a no-show.

Dr. Nancy Minshew and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh, and at Case Western Reserve University are looking for verbal individuals with autism and Asperger's disorder to answer some very important questions about the cognitive and brain basis of autism. The research involves: interviews for diagnosis, cognitive tests, eye movement tests, and brain imaging with MRI.

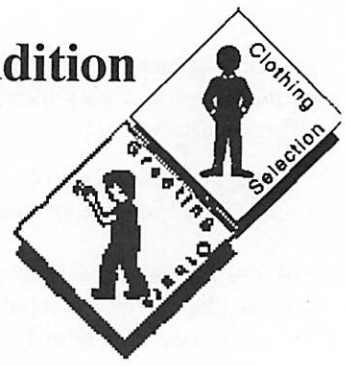
You will get improved diagnosis and differential diagnosis, a better understanding of the cognitive basis of behavior, the results of thousands of dollars of testing at no charge, and the opportunity to talk with a concerned expert about your questions. To be eligible, the person with autism should be between 8 and 50 years of age, speak in sentences, and have an IQ score of 80 or above. Funds are available to support travel expenses. Please call today:

Kathy Maxwell, R.N.
Cleveland
(216) 844-1289

Mrs. Evelyn Herbert
Pittsburgh
(412) 624-0818
e-mail: autism project@msx.upmc.edu



Social Skills Stories: A New Addition to the Curriculum



-Anne Marie Johnson, M.Ed.

Editor's Note: *Anne has been a wife for six years, a mother for four years and an educator for seven years. She earned both a Bachelor's degree and a Master's degree in Special Education from Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. Anne has taught middle school and high school students with extensive and pervasive service needs and currently teaches kindergarten and first grade students for Montgomery County Educational Service Center in Dayton, Ohio. Anne is an Adjunct Professor at Wright State University and author of the book Math Exercises for Nonreaders, More Social Skills Stories, and coauthor of Social Skills Stories. The Picture Communication Symbols which appear in this article are reprinted with permission from the Mayer-Johnson Company.*

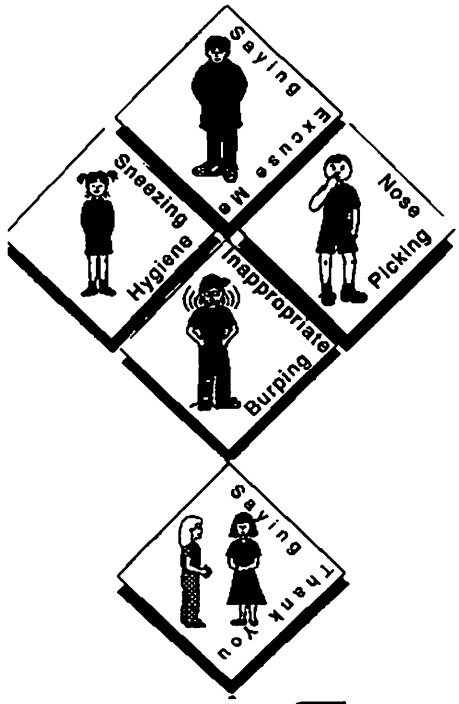
The curriculum manuals for special education have undergone many changes in the last twenty five years, reflecting the evolution of research and instructional techniques. In the seventies, vocational instruction changed the focus of instruction for people with extensive and pervasive service needs, emphasizing abilities over deficits and highlighting the inclusion of people in the workforce who were formerly excluded. In the eighties, Community Based Instruction entered curriculum manuals as another method of assisting students with mastery of tasks and environments, as well as further integration into society.

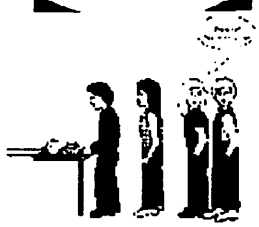
In the nineties, the curriculum books are changing again with the addition of social skills stories and social skills instruction in order to facilitate further integration of people with extensive and pervasive service needs into an ever changing society. We systematically teach vocational skills. We methodically teach reading, writing, math, pedestrian skills, and other essential life skills. Why not systematic instruction on social skills topics which tend to be persistent obstacles to successful integration of people with extensive and pervasive service needs?

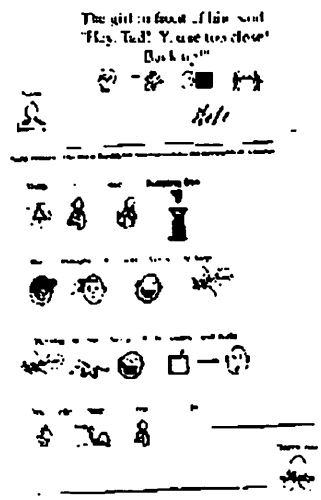
What are social skills? Social skills are manners and behaviors used in personal interaction which are accepted by people of similar culture and background.

What are social skills stories? Social skills stories are picture and print representations of social interactions designed for demonstration and instructional purposes regarding specific social abilities. In each story, one social skill such as, greetings, social space, appropriate conversational topics, or interrupting, is targeted for instruction. The fictional characters in the stories perform social interactions both inappropriately and appropriately with emphasis on the acceptable portrayal. Also included are multiple corresponding activity sheets, evaluation checklists, and generalization activities for the classroom, community and home environments.

How should we use social skills stories? Social skills stories are most effective when NEED DRIVEN. In other words, target the needs of each student first. Then, follow these steps:







Target the skill: What is the specific skill the student needs to learn? What is preventing him/her from total success in social situations?

Choose a social skills story: Which story meets the needs of each student?

Adapt the story: What changes to the story would help the student internalize or generalize the target skill better? Photos? Name changes? Editing negative behaviors portrayed in the story? Eliminating subtle humor or dualities of language in the story?

Ready the story for presentation: Copy the story with necessary adaptations. Color the story as appropriate for the intended audience. Laminate story for durability. Bind story for utility.

Present story: Present story in small group or individualized sessions for best results. Encourage student participation by programming AAC devices with repetitive story lines. Solicit problem-solving ideas from students throughout the story.

Generalize the lesson to other environments: Use extension activities to generalize the lesson to other settings in and around the facility. Use Story Summary Worksheets as communication aids between school and home. Communicate what caregivers can do to assist in teaching the target skill at home.

Document progress: Use social skills checklists to document not only present functioning but current objectives, recent successes and possible goals.

Celebrate Success: Be sure to praise student specifically for success in social situations. Use specific examples of newly acquired skills. Communicate successes to caregivers in other environments.

We have math drills, writing practice, spelling tests, vocational training and community training, so ... WHY NOT SOCIAL SKILLS PRACTICE???

For information on:

Social Skills Stories: Functional Picture Stories for Readers and Nonreaders K-12 by Anne Marie Johnson and Jackie L. Susnik or *More Social Skills Stories: Very Personal Picture Stories for Readers and Nonreaders K-12*, contact Mayer-Johnson Company, (619) 550-0084 or P.O. Box 1579, Solana Beach, CA 92075

Sneeze Louise Poster Activity by Anne Marie Johnson or *Manners Magazine Extension Activity* by Anne Marie Johnson, contact Johnsonwerks, P.O. Box 342, Tipp City, OH 45371 or jhnsnwerks@aol.com

Editor's note: *At THE MORNING NEWS we often receive letters from subscribers from around the world. We typically do not ask to reprint the letters we receive in THE MORNING NEWS. When we received the letter from Debbie Slavin (excerpted below), we decided to ask if we could share her ideas as part of the Social Story Edition. In her letter, Debbie describes how she uses Social Stoeir with her son, Tim. We were intrigued by how Debbie writes the Social Story with Tim, and how she feels they help Tim understand his words have meaning. Pictured at left is Debbie with her son, Tim. Tim appeared in our last issue in the article by Bea Sharkey.*

Dear Carol,

I receive THE MORNING NEWS and enjoyed the article written by Bea Sharkey. Bea is my son Tim's speech therapist. I showed Tim his picture, he said ,"WOW".

I am writing to you because not only do I feel that Social Stories are a wonderful tool, helping children with autistic spectrum disorders to understand their world, I feel it also empowers them, by giving them a voice.

Tim helps me write Social Stories at home. Through his stories, Tim can express his feelings. This tool has given him a voice. I tell him , "Use your words, and people will listen to you." Tim sees the words printed on paper, and knows that his words have meaning.

Social Stories help people to know Tim. He is trying to understand why people say hello to him; through stories they can understand that he is kind, gentle to his pets, and others can see the pure joy he has in doing his best and how hard he works to understand everything around him.

Last spring we went to the beach, bright sun, blue sky, the ocean air was fresh and the water shimmered, there were blue shells on the beach (Tim loves blue). He looked and said, "I know God made this, everything is beautiful, everything is blue." I want people to know this boy.

Tim made a friendship ring for me with blue beads on a safety pin. He said, "You are my friend, you always save me, you help people to know me."

I close this letter with sincere thanks for your gift of Social Stories.

Sincerely,
Debbie Slavin
Pawtucket, RI

Coaching children through tough times

-Connie Langeland

Reprinted with permission from *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 29, 1997.

Here's some advice from psychologist Steven Richfield for that extra sensitive child in the family: *Step into your cantaloupe skin.*

Off the wall? Not when the child considers the alternative - a bruised and yucky banana skin.

Richfield has a prescription for ignoring playground bullies or back-of-the-school-bus teasing: *Don't take the bait.*

Over and over, he offers one key idea to the parents of these high-strung, difficult or (shall we say?) rambunctious children: Be a coach.

Richfield says that parent coaches can teach their children many of the social skills they'll need to function well in the classroom, on the playground - and in their adult lives.

And, since every good coach needs a game plan, Richfield has developed what he calls "Parent Coaching Cards, A System for Guiding Children Toward Behavioral Success." The cards offer practical advice on handling the tantrums, setbacks and frustrations that confound parents of youngsters and adolescents.

Marie Knox-Pomerantz, of King of Prussia, sought out Richfield when her son Scott was a kindergartner who refused to speak aloud in class or on the playground. "He said his voice didn't work," said Knox-Pomerantz.

"When you have a kid like mine - 5, 6 years old, afraid of other kids, afraid of the playground, afraid of birthday parties...what was so helpful was how it took these situations step by step, teaching him how to meet other kids." By rereading the cards on occasion, Knox-Pomerantz found she could help her son find ways to get over those fears.

"He still has episodes," she said, "but I'm quite pleased."

The 4-by 5-inch cards, laminated and held together with a steel key ring, are meant to be handled often and kept someplace handy - even in a bookbag, if conflict at school is the issue.

Each card has a title, such as "Stop and think first to talk smart" and "Don't take the bait." And the narrative on each card is a to-the-point account of a particular social problem, with possible solutions.

For instance, the card counseling a child about "stepping into your cantaloupe skin" starts out by describing how "there are a lot of things in life that hurt our feelings. ...When you have your banana skin on, you feel bruised..." so try wearing a thicker skin.

Richfield, 37, with offices in Norristown and Allentown, specializes in the treatment of disruptive behavior disorders and sees families with children diagnosed as having attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), known for their short attention span and behaviors that are difficult for both child and parent to manage.

Richfield recalled how he found himself hearing out clients - that is to say, parents at their wit's end - and eventually recognized that he was hearing the same laments again and again.

"I grew impatient with the passive, nondirective approach that traditional psychotherapists are trained to enter into," said Richfield. "The themes were so familiar and repetitive in my work. I was hearing the same story over and over, I found I could anticipate what the parent would say."

Then, as his first son grew older, "my theoretical and practical wheels started spinning."

Advice offered in the cards is straightforward, common-sensical. Their value may lie in the very fact that they get carried home - and are therefore within easy reach.

"Most interventions for families with behavior-problem children involve coming to a clinic, being given advice about what to do and then sending the parents home to deal with the problem," said Russell Barkley, a Boston psychiatrist, editor of The ADHD Report and author of the book *Taking Charge of ADHD.*

But when parents find themselves in what Barkley characterized as "the throes of some trauma," they are hard-pressed to recall all those sage words of advice. The coaching cards are useful, said Barkley, precisely because they are at hand when a crisis erupts.

Richfield's parent-coaching approach also is reflective of fresh efforts to counsel young people in conflict resolution and in ways to "stop and think" about consequences before they plunge into bad behavior.

Dozens of elementary schools in the suburbs are using a program developed by a Florida educator known for its red "stop and think" signs that decorate hallways and classrooms. Guided by their teachers, children are learning ways to avoid confrontations and to bring their emotions under control.

The coaching cards, which cost $20, have won praise from parents and from colleagues. Therapist Alice D'Antoni-Phillips of Myrtle Beach, S.C., said she now counsels children "to develop an alligator hide."

"There's not a lot out there for parents and teachers in terms of usable tools to work with children with learning problems and attention deficit disorders in particular," said D'Antoni-Phillips.

"I tell my kids, if I can teach you anything, it's that you can't change anybody else ... but when you change your behavior, other people change in response. So I teach them these people skills - relationship skills - that make life more manageable," she said.

A shortcoming with the cards is that they are written for children who can read well, and D'Antoni-Phillips has urged Richfield to write cards aimed at first-grade readers.

Susan Sozogni's 9 1/2-year-old son, Chris, has ADHD and is, in the parlance of therapists, "very noncompliant."

After absorbing the lessons from several of the cards, Sozogni said, she found that her role in tense situations had shifted.

"Where he's out of control, angry, distrustful, I'm not the big bad parent but the coach trying to give him certain skills." Having this role, she said, "keeps you from just shouting at your child, screaming, getting mad."

On a recent rainy evening, Richfield was handing out sample cards to about 30 adults - many of them mothers coping with rebellious adolescents - at a parents' event at Plymouth Whitemarsh High School.

Also attending were several counselors more than ready to share accounts of teenagers in crisis - and of parents who might be well served by a different set of coaching cards, ones with such titles as "Growing up before your kids do" and "If you don't say no, who will?"

The introductory card to Richfield's set talks about a child's "thinking side" and his "reacting side." Speaking directly to the child, the card talks about reactions that "can cause us to say and do things that create problems."

"That's why," the card states, "it's better to keep your thinking side in charge of what you say and do."

As Richfield talked, his audience thumbed through the cards.

"What I'm getting," said one parent, "is that I can take all these situations and show my child how similar they are to what's happening in his life."

Is there a place in Richfield's system for discipline? another parent asked. Yes, he replied, children need to learn there are consequences to misbehavior.

But if the parent limits his role to disciplinarian, the therapist said, an opportunity is lost to guide, coach, instruct on other ways to behave.

"You want your child to wrestle with the issue," said Richfield, "not with you."

Richfield and his wife, Caryn, also a therapist, have two sons, Jeremy, 8, and Jesse, 5 next month. His own preference in parenting styles, said Richfield, is "firm assertive rather than authoritarian ... more a mixture of high warmth, high nurturing, high active guiding, along with firm adherence to basic values and rules."

And yes, the Richfield boys are growing up and knowing all about cantaloupe skins and not taking the bait and the time-honored "You can't always get what you want" - and a few more adages that have yet to make their way onto Richfield's Parent Coaching ring of cards.

Editor's note: *We receive many Social Stories at our office. This one, titled, "What is a Friendly Bump?" addresses a common and somewhat complex issue in a simple, straight forward, and positive way. The author is Marcelle Richardson, M.A., C.C.C.-S.L.P., a speech and language pathologist at Madison Elementary School in the Cajon Valley School District, San Diego, California.*

What is a Friendly Bump?

- Marcelle Richardson

I am Kelli.
I am 7 years old.
I go to Madison School.
I am in Mrs. Traxler's class.
Sometimes I may go to Mrs. Jones' class.
Mrs. Jones is another teacher at Madison School.
Sometimes children sit on the rug.
Sometimes they line up.
A friend might bump me accidentally.
That is okay.
That is a friendly bump.
Kids bump into each other sometimes.
I will try to ignore it when I get a friendly bump.

THE MORNING NEWS Sale of Back Issues

If you would like to order back issues of *THE MORNING NEWS*, please complete this form and return with a check or money order in U.S. funds. Shipping/handling is included, allow 4 weeks for delivery. Supplies are limited.

Fall 1996: Explaining a Diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome
This issue features: *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Programs for Students with Autism* by Dr. Edna Smith; *How Do You Share the News?* by Dr. Tony Attwood; *Pictures of Me: Introducing Students with Asperger's Syndrome to their Talents, Personality, & Diagnosis* by Carol Gray; and *Ideas from Parents of Children with Asperger's Syndrome* by Ellen Tanis & Debi Donaldson.

Winter 1997: Special Edition: A Celebration of Shared Experience, Creativity, and Talent
This issue features the writings and art work of children and adolescents diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders. Their collective works have resulted in a very creative, thoughtful, and colorful edition of *THE MORNING NEWS.*

Spring 1998: THE SOCIAL STORY EDITION, Part I
This issue features: *The Links Between Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations and the Cognitive Models of Autism* by Dr. Tony Attwood; *Pigeons at Recess, etc.* by Beatrice S. Sharkey; *The Musical Path to Social Skills* by Jeanne Lyons; and *Behavioral Issues and the Use of Social Stories* by Beverly Vicker.

Summer 1998 (this issue): THE SOCIAL STORY EDITION, Part II
This issue features: a 24 page rip-out section titled*The Advanced Social Story Workbook* by Carol Gray; *A real person* by Gunilla Gerland; *Social Skills Stories: A New Addition to the Curriculum* by Anne Marie Johnson; and *Coaching children through tough times* by Connie Langeland.

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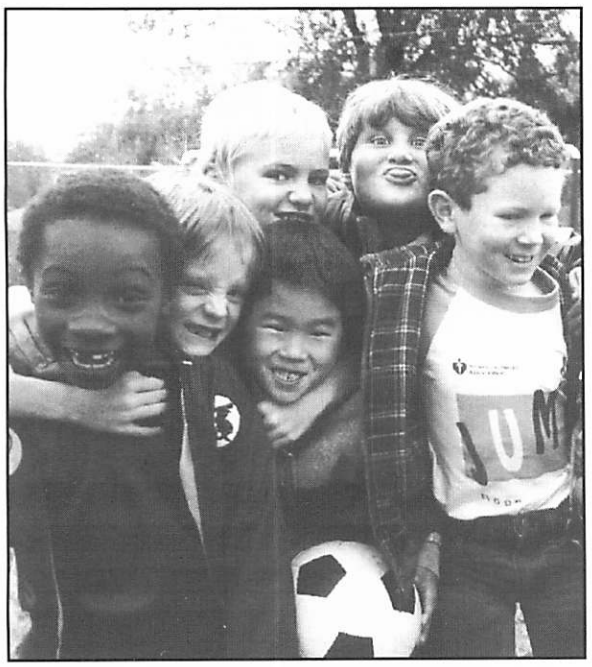


A special rip-out section...

The Advanced Social Story Workbook

- Carol Gray, Jenison Public Schools

Table of Contents

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to

Karen Lind and Sue Jonker

for their skilled contributions to this workbook, THE MORNING NEWS,

and the education of children with autistic spectrum disorders.

 The Advanced Social Story Workbook is a rip-out section of THE MORNING NEWS Vol. 10, Number 2. Additional copies of the entire issue may be purchased from Jenison Public Schools, depending on availability. For information, contact THE MORNING NEWS, Jenison Public Schools, 2140 Bauer Road, Jenison, MI. 49428. Phone: 616-457-8955 FAX: 616-457-8442

The Advanced Social Story Workbook:
What it is, how to use it

In January of 1991, the first Social Story was written for Tim, a kindergarten student with high functioning autism. He was overwhelmed by the weekly physical education class. On the day this consultant observed, his class was playing a game titled, "Charlie Over the Water". Initially, Tim seemed confused by the game. By the end of class, Tim's behavior reflected his confusion and frustration. A story was developed to describe the game, and Tim read it once a day for a week. At the request of this consultant, the class played the game a second time the following week. Tim's behavior was dramatically different. Tim volunteered to be Charlie; he was relaxed, happy, and *having fun*. Tim understood the game and how to be a part of it.

Tim's success prompted the use of similar stories with several other students, to address a variety of topics. Some of the stories were effective, others were not. The most effective stories were carefully studied. It was discovered they shared some common elements or characteristics. The result was the identification of three basic types of sentences (descriptive, perspective, and directive) and a ratio defining their relationship to one another. In addition, guidelines to follow when writing a story for a person with an autistic spectrum disorder were also identified. Together, these elements defined what a Social Story is, and how it should be developed. These characteristics are very briefly summarized on the second page of this workbook.

This is not a beginners workbook; it is intended for parents and professionals who have experience with Social Stories and would like to advance their skills. Others may enjoy it as a glimpse of the direction of Social Stories in the future. This workbook picks up where the Social Story UnLimitedTM workshops leave off: presenting in three sections information about additional Social Story sentences, stories about thoughts, and split section stories respectively. It is literally a "take-out" style workshop, complete with examples, exercises, and an answer appendix.

Participants in this advanced "workshop" are advised to follow a few suggestions. First, read and complete the workbook in sequential order. The concepts build upon one another. Second, be patient. It may be necessary to re-read a section, or think a while about a particular item in an exercise. (A side note: within the context of this workbook, the term *story* is frequently used to refer to the more formal term, *Social Story.)*

THE MORNING NEWS has traditionally provided a means to update the Social Story approach, and share practical ideas with others who work on behalf of children and adults with autistic spectrum disorders. This workbook is a reflection of that continuing commitment.

Social Stories 101:
A brief review of the basics

What is a Social Story?

A *Social Story* is a story defined by a specific format and guidelines that objectively describes a person, skill, event, concept, or social situation. Social Stories require consideration of the perspective of the person with an autistic spectrum disorder (A.S.D.). Most Social Stories are written by parents or professionals. The goal of a Social Story is to share relevant information, including *where* and *when* a situation takes place, *who* is involved, *what* is occurring, and *why*.

Types of Social Story Sentences and Ratio

Social Stories are comprised of a combination of up to three types of sentences: *descriptive, perspective,* and *directive* sentences. Descriptive sentences objectively define where a situation occurs, who is involved, what they are doing, and why. Perspective sentences are statements that describe the thoughts of other people. Directive sentences are statements that directly define what is expected as a response to a given cue or situation. These sentences gently direct a student's behavior, often beginning with, "I will try..." or "I will work on...".

The Basic Social Story Ratio defines the proportion of descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences in a Social Story. This ratio is maintained regardless of the length of a Social Story, and ensures their descriptive quality:

0 - 1 directive sentence
_____ = Basic Social Story Ratio
2 - 5 descriptive and/or perspective sentences

The following sample Social Story identifies each type of sentence, and illustrates how the Basic Social Story Ratio applies:

On most school days we have recess (descriptive). Usually, recess is outdoors (descriptive). Sometimes, recess is indoors (descriptive). Usually our principal looks at the weather to decide if recess is going to be indoors (perspective). The principal will tell my teacher if recess has to be indoors (descriptive). If recess is indoors, I will try to stay calm (directive). On another day, recess will be outdoors (descriptive).

The Social Story Guidelines

The Social Story Guidelines are based on the learning characteristics of people with A.S.D. Every Social Story adheres to the following guidelines: 1) positively state desired behaviors; 2) write at or slightly below a student's comprehension level, keeping stories short for not-yet readers; 3) provide assistance recognizing and interpreting social cues, describe *who, what, when, where, and why;* 4) "write-in reality" by mentioning variations in routine; 5) use care with illustrations, being cautious of extraneous details; 6) consider using "Wh" questions as titles or subtitles; 7) functionally or visually define ambiguous terms; 8) carefully write from a first person perspective; 9) ensure the story is accurate if interpreted literally, using terms like *sometimes* and *usually*; and 10) consider incorporating interests into how a story is written or implemented. The Social Story Guidelines ensure the accuracy of each Social Story, as well as their patient and reassuring quality.

Social Stories 501:
The Advanced Class

Additional Social Story Sentences and the Complete Social Story Ratio

In addition to descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences, there are three other types of sentences that may be used in a Social Story: control, cooperative, and partial sentences. These sentences take a Social Story beyond a simple description of a social event, providing additional information that emphasizes the participation of both the student and others in effective social interactions. They may be most applicable in stories for students who are older, or higher functioning. Each of these sentences are described in this section, and incorporated into the Complete Social Story Ratio. ***Exercise 1*** on the following page reviews these sentences.

When someone says, 'I changed my mind, I can think of an idea becoming better - like a caterpillar, changing into a butterfly.

Control sentences are statements written by a student to identify strategies the student may use to recall the information in a Social Story. In writing a control sentence, a student may also incorporate his/her interests or favorite writing style. First, the student reviews the Social Story, adding control sentences of his/her own. In assisting a student in writing a control sentence, encourage the student to think of concrete, visual images (does this story make you think of any pictures?) that may help in developing a sentence that will retrieve important social information at the right time. Frederick became upset whenever someone said, "I changed my mind!" After reading a Social Story about what people actually mean when they say that, he developed this sentence: "When someone says, 'I changed my mind, I can think of an idea becoming better - like a caterpillar, changing into a butterfly."

My Mom, Dad, and teachers will help me as I learn to use the toilet.

Cooperative sentences are credited to Dr. Demetrious Haracopos, Denmark, who developed these sentences to identify what others will do to assist the student. 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." Cooperative sentences remind parents, peers, and/or professionals of the importance of their role in the success of the student, and may help to ensure consistent responses.

My teacher will probably feel _____if I stand and walk in a line quietly.

Partial sentences encourage a student to make guesses regarding the next step in a situation, the response of another individual, or his / her own response. When used in a cooperative sentence,

Exercise 1: Identify the following sentences as descriptive (de), perspective (p), directive (di), control (cl), or cooperative (co). If you think some sentences are tricky, you're right. Consider your responses carefully. The questions they raise are discussed in the Answer Appendix. Then, select three to write as partial statements.

1.___ Sometimes I eat vegetables, sometimes I eat meat. I eat many different kinds of food.
2.___ Mrs. Hall likes to keep children safe on her bus.
3.___ Dad will stay with me in the doctor's office.
4.___ I will think of directions as advertisements inviting me to join in.
5.___ I will try to keep my seat belt on in the bus.
6.___ After I finish chewing my food, I swallow it. 7.___ Then I take another small bite.
8.___ Sometimes, children play games at recess.

Answers in the Answer Appendix.

a partial statement provides the student with the opportunity to identify what others may do to assist as s/he learns a new skill. In a Social Story, descriptive, perspective, cooperative and/or directive sentences may be written by parents/professionals as a partial statement, with the student completing the sentence. In the process of reviewing a Social Story, the parent/professional helps the student complete the unfinished statement. For example, following a series of sentences describing why children have to sometimes stand and walk in lines at school, a partial perspective sentence concludes the story with, "My teacher will probably feel _____ if I stand and walk in a line quietly." Sometimes, to encourage comprehension, a Social Story may initially contain only complete sentences, with key sentences changed to partial statements after the student becomes familiar with the story.

The Complete Social Story Ratio is similar to the Basic Social Story Ratio. It includes the basic sentences (descriptive, perspective, and directive) and control, cooperative, and partial sentences. The numbers in the ratio remain unchanged. Complete ***Exercise 2*** before turning the page.

Exercise 2: Make a guess - based on the above information and your understanding of Social Stories, complete the Complete Social Story Ratio below by writing the different types of sentences into the ratio. *Answer on the following page.*

0 - 1
_____ **= The Complete Social Story Ratio**
2 - 5

$$\frac{\text{0-1 (partial or complete) directive or control sentences}}{\text{2 - 5 (partial or complete) descriptive, perspective, or cooperative sentences}} = \text{The Complete Social Story Ratio}$$

The Complete Social Story Ratio applies when the story is considered as a whole. For example, a story could open with a total of 7 sentences, some which are descriptive, perspective, partial, and/or cooperative sentences, and close with 2 directive sentences, and still adhere to the Complete Social Story Ratio.

In summary, the addition of control, cooperative, and partial sentences provide an author with additional resources to use and apply when developing a Social Story. Inadvertently, they bring to an author's awareness important factors that may be considered for inclusion in a Social Story - the role of the student in determining his/her own new responses, the efforts of others in the student's success, and comprehension and application of new social information.

Stories about Thoughts

Social Stories about thoughts may be more challenging to write than Social Stories about a situation or observable social skill. The content may initially seem too abstract and difficult to describe in simple terms, especially when the visual, factual learning style of students with autistic spectrum disorders is considered. However, with some special care and consideration, Social Stories may be an effective instructional tool for sharing this type of social information. This section explores how Social Stories may be developed, and enhanced, to help students understand information about thoughts.

Social Stories about thoughts are different from their more traditional counterparts. Many Social Stories contain references to the thoughts or feelings of others. For example, a story about setting the table at dinner may include this perspective sentence, "My Mom and Dad will be happy to have help with dinner". In this case, helping at dinner is the general topic of the Social Story, and the reference to the feelings of Mom and Dad enhances the topic. This is in contrast to Social Stories where the *topic* is thoughts or feelings. In this case, the entire story describes an aspect of cognitive function; as in a Social Story about what another person thinks or knows.

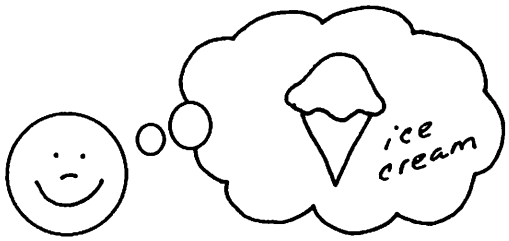
Defining Thought Vocabulary

The first step to writing about thoughts is to establish a basic vocabulary that will be used consistently. These stories are presenting information that may be new or more challenging for the student. The selection of a set vocabulary to refer to the internal state(s) of the student and others

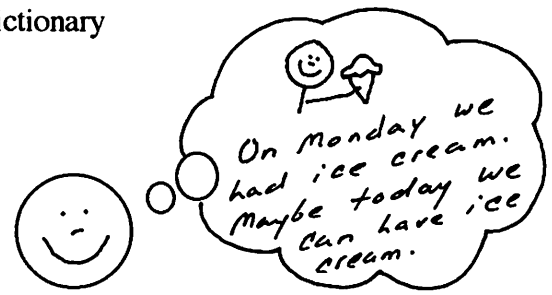
provides consistency and predictability. For example, it may be confusing if the words *understand* and *comprehend* are used interchangeably, or if the word *estimate* is suddenly used in place of the word *guess*. Carefully select a few terms to use consistently within a story, and for all stories written for a specific student.

A *Social Story Dictionary* may be developed to define each of the terms used to refer to thoughts. In this case, expanding on some of the definitions used with Comic Strip Conversations (Gray, 1994) may be applicable. Figure 1 illustrates definitions for the terms ***thoughts*** and ***think***.

Figure 1: Sample entries in a Social Story Dictionary



thoughts: Words and pictures of the mind. I have thoughts. Other people have thoughts.

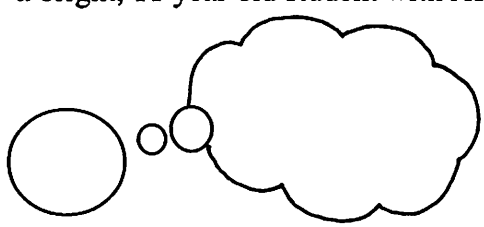


think: What my mind does with thoughts; how I make an idea. I *think*. Other people *think*.

Other possible vocabulary may include (and are not limited to): ***know,*** ***guess,*** *idea, wonder,* ***learn,*** *forget, understand, believe, suppose, confused,* ***decide,*** *expect, hope, anticipate,* ***topic,*** *and opinion.* Terms this author feels are most important appear in boldface. The number of defined terms is dependent on the skill and ability of the student. A definition may read more like a Social Story, providing illustrations, concrete examples or references to common phrases that contain the defined word.

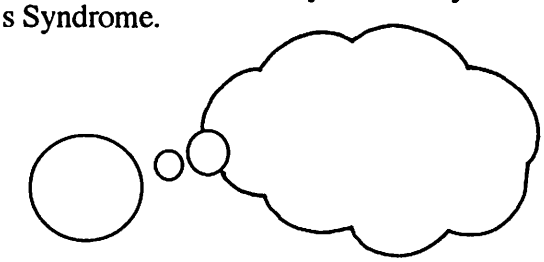
Using the samples of Social Story Dictionary entries for *thoughts* and *think* in Figure 1 above, complete similar entries for *guess* and *decide* in ***Exercise 3,*** below. This is not easy!

Exercise 3: Complete the entries *guess* and *learn* for a Social Story Dictionary for a bright, 11 year old student with Asperger's Syndrome.



guess: _____

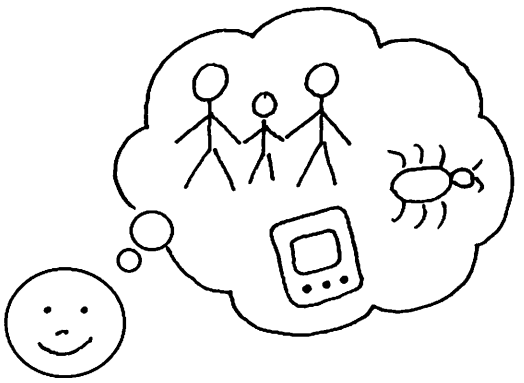
_____



decide: _____

_____

Figure 2: Sample first page of a Who Knows What? Story



My name is Jessica. Sometimes, I like to think about my family, tv, *or* bugs. *I think about other things, too.*

Who Knows What?

Learning that *others* have thoughts, making accurate guesses about what *others* may be thinking, and applying this information is especially difficult for people with autistic spectrum disorders. Though it may sound complex at first, the information can be made surprisingly simple, tangible, and relatively easy to comprehend. In this and the following section, several Social Stories - with increasing difficulty and complexity - are presented. All share information about what others think, and collectively demonstrate how Social Stories may be used to share information about the thoughts of others.

A Who Knows What? Story provides the first, and simplest, example of a Social Story about thoughts. The first page identifies what the student likes to think about. This page may be completed with the student. A simple illustration may accompany the text (Figure 2, above).

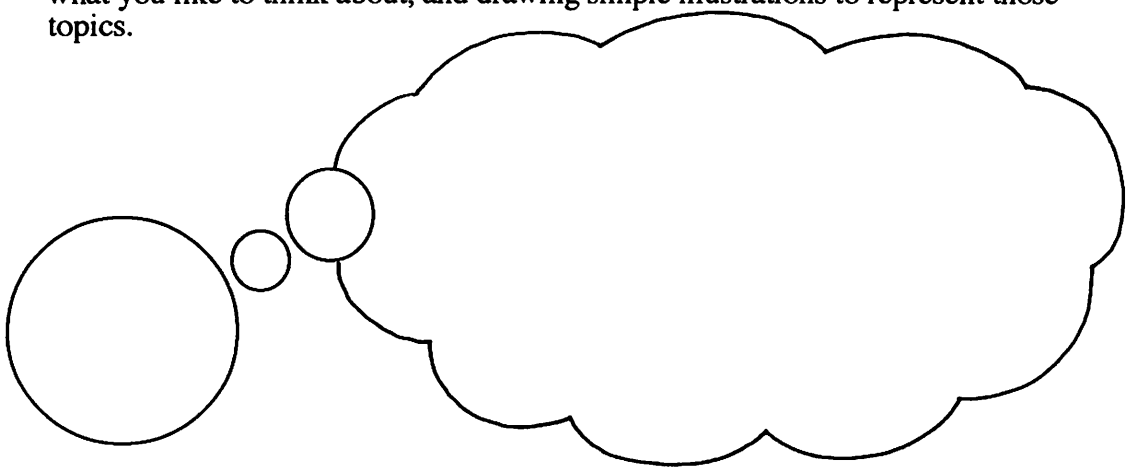
(Page 1) *My name is Jessica. Sometimes, I like to think about* _____, _____, *or* _____. *I think about other things, too.*

Next, the parent/professional completes the second page as the student looks on, identifying what *he/she* thinks about.

(Page 2) *(Grandpa, My Dad, Mr. Hall, etc.) thinks, too. He sometimes likes to think about* _____, _____, *or* _____. *He thinks about other things, too.*

Before completing a Who Knows What? Story with a student, the parent/professional needs to take a few minutes to prepare. The concepts may be challenging for the student; it's important for the parent/professional to be confident with this material. Without some prior consideration, a parent/professional may find it a little difficult to quickly identify what s/he thinks about, or to draw the corresponding illustration. On the following page, ***Exercise 4*** gives the parent/professional practice, providing an opportunity to complete the second page from a Who Knows What? Story.

Exercise 4: Finish page 2 from a Who Knows What? Story by identifying what you like to think about, and drawing simple illustrations to represent those topics.



_____*thinks, too.* _____*sometimes likes to think about* _____, _____, *or* _____. _____*thinks about other things, too.*

Additional pages for the student's story - for Dad, baby brother, sister, grandma, a friend, etc. may be completed following the same process. All pages do not need to be completed at the same time - the child's interest and attention span will provide a good pace for completing a Who Knows What? Story.

The Who Knows What? Story described here provides a sample format for a simple Social Story describing what people think, and introduces the topics people think about. By changing a few words, and making a few simple revisions in the text, the Who Knows What? Story can be used to introduce new vocabulary or concepts. For example, replacing "likes to think about" with "knows" or "knows how to do many things", changes the focus of the story. When writing a Social Story about what other people know or know how to do, doctors, dentists, teachers, and babies provide interesting examples. Again, it's important for the parent/professional to develop ideas ahead of time.

On the next page, ***Exercise 5*** provides practice identifying what people know. The task may seem simple; however, some people in the list - the baby, for example, may require some thought. The goal is to be quick, comfortable and confident in identifying at least three topics or areas of knowledge associated with each of several different people. Information from the list in Exercise 5 can be used to develop a *Who Knows What Chart,* and can be the basis for additional stories, described in more detail in the following sections.

Exercise 5: Complete the blanks in these partial sentences. Several answers are possible - for this exercise, try to think of general topic areas applicable to any person falling within the stated category.

1. **Babies** know about _____, _____, and _____.
2. **Teachers** know about_____, _____, and_____.
3. **Store clerks** know about_____, _____, and_____.
4. **Grandpas** know about _____, _____, and_____.
5. **Veterinarians** know about_____, _____, and_____.
6. **Substitutes** know about_____, _____, and_____.
7. **Truck drivers** know about_____, _____, and_____.
8. **Moms** know about_____, _____, and_____.
9. **The paper boy** knows about_____, _____, and_____.
10. **I know about**_____, _____, and_____.

Answers in the Answer Appendix.

The Who Knows What? Chart is similar to a popular poster that illustrates several emotions with the use of expressive caricatures (Kroehnert, as included in Attwood, 1998, Appendix 2). The Who Knows What? Chart, however, replaces the caricatures with photographs of the faces of people important in a student's life. Next to each photograph is a thought symbol. Under each picture is a brief statement about what that person knows (or likes). For example, *Dad knows about _____, _____, _____, and other things, too.* Illustrations of topics each person knows about are placed in their thought symbol. In this way, the chart summarizes information from a Who Knows What? Story on one piece of paper or poster board. If room allows, there are empty lines below each photograph, and the student is invited to write additional topics or interests on these lines as they become apparent to him/her.

In summary, developing a Social Story about thoughts begins with the identification of a basic, consistent thought vocabulary. This vocabulary is used to write stories about thoughts. The simplest of these stories identify what people know. In addition, Social Stories may be developed to introduce how information about what other people know may be applied in a social interaction or situation. In the following section, sample Social Stories that share this increasingly complex social information are presented.

Thought, Behavior, and Social Context Stories

Thought, Behavior, and Social Context Stories expand on information about what other people know, tying that information to a variety of social concepts. To simplify the information,

predictable, repetitive formats - similar to the Who Knows What? Stories - are used. In addition, these stories may refer the student to a Who Knows What? Chart to complete partial sentences. Any of these stories may be illustrated, with one concept per page, or presented as text on a single page for students who are more advanced. There is room for creativity and individualization, despite the structured format.

The simplest of these stories tie thoughts to *one* other social factor - for example, *what a person says* or *what a person does.* In the following excerpt, the connection between what a person says and thinks is described. A descriptive sentence identifies *observable or tangible information* (what the student talks about)*first.* Next, a partial perspective sentence identifies what the student is likely to be thinking). This pattern is repeated to describe what *other* people say and think:

I often talk about dinosaurs (descriptive). I often think about _____(partial perspective).
I often talk about trains. I often think about_____.
I often talk about bus schedules. I often think about_____.
Matt often talks about dinosaurs. I guess Matt often thinks about_____.

An additional sentence may be added to tie the information to a practical social skill:

Matt may like it if I ask him about _____ (partial perspective).

The following sample excerpt is similar. Here, a connection between what people *do* and what they may be thinking is described:

I often play with dinosaurs. I often think about dinosaurs.
Mary often plays with dolls. I guess Mary often thinks about_____.

Thought, Behavior, and Social Context Stories can be developed with increasing complexity. The following excerpt illustrates a story that describes the relationship between actions, words, and thoughts. The excerpt begins with a descriptive sentence about an observable action (sewing). Next, a series of perspective, descriptive, and/or partial perspective sentences relate the action to statements and thoughts (note the possible variety of thought vocabulary, in boldface):

Grandma sews clothes (descriptive, observable behavior). Grandma ***knows*** *how to sew (perspective; related thought or knowledge). Sometimes Grandma says, "I have fun when I sew!" (descriptive). Grandma* ***loves*** *to _____(partial perspective). (I* ***think*** *or* ***believe*** *or* ***guess*** *that...) Grandma may sew gifts (or* ***decide*** *to sew gifts) for Hanukkah.*

The samples provided in this workbook provide a starting point for utilizing a predictable format to gradually introduce increasingly complex social information. Creativity and ingenuity can apply this format to address an infinite variety of thought-related topics. The final sample excerpt from a Social Story presents information about *ability,* and it's relationship to *performance.* Notice the story begins as the other samples, with observable, tangible information:

Many of Miguel's math papers have perfect grades. Miguel says that math is easy for him. I guess that Miguel knows a lot about math (addition, subtraction). Miguel may be a person who knows more about math than I do. This is okay.

In summary, teaching about thoughts can be challenging - especially considering the abstract nature of the information, and the concrete, visual learning style of children with autistic spectrum disorders. Parents/professionals should take care to visually define or demonstrate a specific thought and feeling vocabulary, and use these terms consistently. Applying a consistent format adds predictability and simplifies the information; making it easier for the student to comprehend social information and apply it to daily situations.

Split Section Social Stories

A new children's book, *Milo and the Magical Stones* (Pfister, 1997) is a picture book with two endings. Milo is a mouse who discovers magic stones that prove to be very valuable. He shares his discovery with other mice. Half way into the book, the pages are horizontally split. The top half of the remaining pages describe a happy ending to the story - the bottom half, a sad ending. Both endings occur within the same segment of time. If the two endings of the story were presented in sequence, following one another, the story would not be nearly as effective. The split section format enhances the meaning of the story. *Milo and the Magical Stones* serves as a model for *Split Section Social Stories:* stories addressing topics that include "socially simultaneous" information - activities and events that occur during the same period of time.

A Split Section Social Story may be more effective than a typical Social Story in describing simultaneous events or activities. For example, consider a story that describes three possible activities for a Saturday afternoon - the museum, the aquarium, or seeing a movie. The student needs to make a choice, selecting one of the three activities. In a typical Social Story, these options would be presented on three *consecutive* pages. This could potentially mislead a student who has difficulty judging time, or who interprets the story format literally. S/he may mistakenly believe that the museum, the aquarium, and seeing a movie will occur consecutively, as they do in the story. In contrast, a section with split pages is consistent with the meaning of the text - demonstrating that the museum, the aquarium, and seeing a movie are available in *the same time slot* - and that only one may be selected. Making choices between activities is one of many

possible Social Story topics that involve simultaneous activities and events. This article describes how to develop a Social Story with split sections, and discusses several topics that may be enhanced with this type of format.

The Format

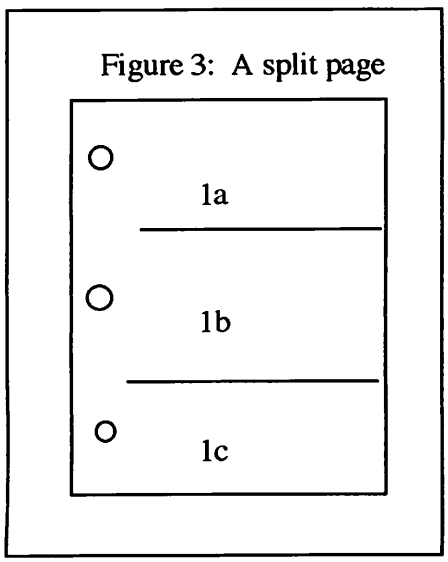


Figure 3: A split page

Developing a Social Story with split pages is easier than it may initially seem - involving simple revisions in format (split pages), and consideration of the split page format when writing the text. The split section is comprised of one or more pages horizontally cut into two or more equal sections. A 1" left margin is left uncut on each split page to make the story easy to place in a report cover. This also prevents the split sections from sliding out of place, and keeps them straight and easy to handle. Figure 3 illustrates how a page is split, and how sections in a split page are identified. A number identifies the page, and a, b, or c refers to the top, middle, and bottom section respectively; the top section of the first page, then, is identified with 1a.

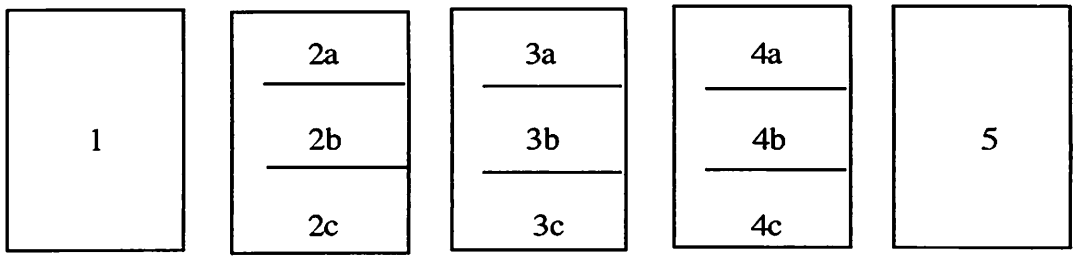
Every story, including Social Stories, has three basic parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. In a Social Story, any of these sections may include split pages. Most frequently, split pages will occur in the body of the Social Story, or in part of the body. However, some topics will dictate the use of split pages in the introduction or conclusion. As a general guideline, split pages are used most frequently in a Social Story where the text presents socially simultaneous information.

The Text

A Split Section Social Story is written similar to any Social Story, following the Basic or Complete Social Story Ratio and the Social Story Guidelines that define Social Stories. Illustrations may be used throughout the story.

In this section, a sample Split Section Social Story is presented. On the following page, Figure 4 provides a "map" of this story, illustrating which pages are complete, and those that are split. The text is identified according to where it will be placed on the diagram in Figure 4, for example, text identified with 2a indicates it's placement on the top section of the second page. The topic of the sample story, introduced earlier, is about making a choice between going to the museum, the aquarium, and the movies.

Figure 4: "Map" of the sample Split Section Social Story



Page 1: This page introduces the topic, often by describing events that immediately precede the split section information. In this example, Andrew is introduced to the expectations for Saturday morning, and his choices for the afternoon:

My name is Andrew. This Saturday morning, Mom will tell me to complete three chores. My chores are to take out the trash, clean my room, and rake the leaves. This helps Mom and Dad. I will try to finish my chores.

After lunch, I have a choice. I will have time for one activity. I may choose between going to the museum, the aquarium, or the movies. It is my choice.

Pages 2a, 3a, and 4a: Text on these pages describes the first activity. In this case, details about a possible trip to the museum are described. Notice the use of perspective sentences. The use of partial descriptive sentences allows Andrew to add his own details that may be important in making his decision:

Page 2a: *I may decide to go to the museum. Dad loves antique cars. Dad would like to take me to the museum. If I like, I may invite a friend. We usually take the bus to the museum.*

Page 3a: *At the museum, we can see old airplanes and trains. We may also see*_____, _____, *or maybe*_____.

Page 4a: *The bus will bring us back to the bus stop, and we will return home by dinner.*

Pages 2b, 3b, and 4b: Text on these pages describes the second activity. Andrew's option to go to the aquarium is described:

Page 2b: *I may decide to go to the aquarium. Mom loves to see fish. Mom would like to take me to the aquarium. If I like, I may invite a friend. We usually take the bus to the aquarium.*

Page 3b: *At the aquarium, we can see brightly colored fish. They have a new shark exhibit there, too. We may also see_____, _____, or maybe_____.*

Page 4b: *The bus will bring us back to the bus stop, and we will be home by dinner.*

Page 2c, 3c, and 4c: Text on these pages describes the third activity. Andrew's option to go to the movies is described:

Page 2c: *I may decide to go to the movies. Mom and Dad would like to take me to the movies, or I may invite a friend. Mom or Dad will drive our car to the movies.*

Page 3c: *We can see "Paulie". Paulie is a parrot that can have conversations with people. The movie is about Paulie's adventures.*

Page 4c: *Mom or Dad will drive us home, and we will be home for dinner.*

Page 5: If a similar event follows each of the activities described on the split pages, it is described in text on the closing page, or conclusion. In Andrew's story, the page five "pulls the story together", and demonstrates what will happen next, regardless of Andrew's choice:

We will eat dinner at home on Saturday. I would like to have _____ for dinner. I may tell Mom that I would like to have_____for dinner. Mom makes the decisions about dinner, but maybe she will like my idea.

Split Section Social Story Topics

The Split Section Social Story is designed to enhance the clarity and meaning of *some* Social Story topics. In general, topics where there are sets of information that need to be considered simultaneously, or where the independent activities of several people are related, are enhanced by a split section format. The goal in either case is to assist a student in understanding a "bigger picture"; to increase a student's awareness of social information that may not be directly observed by the student. In this section, two basic topic areas that may be enhanced by a Split Section Social Story format are discussed: *Social Stories about choices* and *Social Stories about related activities* (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: List of topics that may be enhanced by a split section Social Story format.

Stories about *CHOICE:*

...between two or more activities
...between a familiar vs. unfamiliar activity
...between accepting or declining an invitation
...that may not be decided until later; when plans are "up in the air"
...to use a new response; choose between one or more good responses, or apply a new social skill

Stories about *RELATED ACTIVITIES* that occur simultaneously:

...over a few hours or less (during the course of a single day)
...over several days or more (vacations)
...in preparation for a single shared event (holiday, group project)
...in preparation for a single event that will result in individual performances (test)
...individual responses to a single event (hearing a joke, riding a roller coaster)

Social Stories about Choice

Considering the skills involved in making even the most basic decision, the phrase "a simple choice" could be viewed as an oxymoron; especially from the perspective of a person with an autistic spectrum disorder. A single choice involves comparing two or more sets of information *simultaneously.* This can be difficult for students with A.S.D., who have difficulty retrieving relevant, related experiences, predicting consequences, and/or comparing two or more sets of information. As in the previous sample Social Story about selecting one of three possible activities, Social Stories about choices make this process tangible, enabling a student to compare options using visual materials. Among the most important decisions are those with social consequences, or *social choices.* Many social choices fall into one of three general categories - activities, playmates and partners, and skills and responses.

Choices involving activities may include deciding: between two or more activities; to engage in a familiar versus a new activity; whether to accept, decline, or make an invitation; or to use a new or current response to a specific situation. Each of these topic areas involve two or more sets of

simultaneous information, making them conducive to a split section format. However, several factors - including their focus and how they are presented - distinguish them from one another.

The first, *choosing between two or more activities,* was discussed in the previous sample Social Story about selecting one of three possible options. In the sample story, the choice is between three enjoyable activities. Sometimes, the activities may not be viewed as equally fun or positive - as in *choosing between a familiar and a new, unfamiliar activity.* When writing about a novel activity, it's important to include references to other similar activities that may be more familiar, in addition to describing the new activity. In this way, a Social Story can tie past to current and/or future experiences.

Receiving and making invitations present a different type of social choice. These stories can be written to address a variety of invitation-related situations. Some examples include: deciding whether to accept or decline an invitation, choosing who to invite to a movie or an art show, or deciding between playmates for an afternoon. In the last two examples, the context (movie, art show, or playing at home) may be identical in each of the split sections in the story, and the people involved will be different. In this case, the Social Story will describe the interests or favorite activities of each playmate, assisting the student with an autistic spectrum disorder in matching potential playmates to a specific event or context.

Occasionally, *plans are "up in the air",* that is - a choice is going to have to be made later, in response to one or more factors that are not possible to predict. For example, a gathering is planned at grandpa and grandma's house: if it is sunny there will be a picnic, if it is raining, there will be a dinner and board games indoors. Using a split section, both possibilities are described.

Finally, a Social Story with a split section may elevate some of the uncertainty involved in *choosing between or applying new social skills.* New social responses elicit unfamiliar responses from others. Even though others may react positively, applying a new social skill results in "uncharted" and potentially unpredictable social territory. This may make it difficult for a student to confidently decide to use a new, more effective response to a social situation. Using a split section in a Social Story may help. First, a split section Social Story can describe and compare several good responses to a situation. For example, a compliment could result in: 1) a simple "thank you", 2) a compliment in return, or 3) an opportunity to initiate a related conversation. Second, these stories help a student recognize or understand the subtle but important variations in a new social skill. Consider the topic of *making an apology.* A Social Story with a split section enables the author to describe the subtle details of making an apology. The introduction describes the situation. Each "split section" describes a possible apology and the responses of others. One split section discusses an apology that is immediate and sincere, the other, an apology that is delayed by several days, but sincere. In this way a Social Story can assist a student in comparisons of subtle but important social factors.

Social Stories about Related Activities

Several years ago, John, a preschooler with an autistic spectrum disorder, had difficulty as he was dropped off at school. En route to school each morning, John's mother would brace herself emotionally and physically for a traumatic and seemingly unavoidable sequence: John would cry, scream, and cling to his mother or the frame of the classroom door. At times, he would break free from the efforts of staff, and dart across the parking lot to return to his mother's car. A Social Story was written for John to describe his mother's activities while he was at school. In addition, the story reassured John that his mother knew where he was, how to get there, and what time to pick him up from school. Much to the relief of the staff and John's mother, a more relaxed morning sequence emerged: John would silently flip through the pages of his story each morning on the ride to school, and arrive at school calm and relaxed.

John's story did not use split pages, but it serves as a good example of the topic area of related activities that may have been enhanced by a split section format. Social Stories about related activities share information with a student about activities that are not directly observed by the student, but relevant or related to their current or future experience. Other similar topics may include getting ready for the day each morning, or getting dinner on the table. Stories about related activities describe the larger social picture - how others contribute to a common experience or sequence of events - and the student's role within that context. Split pages enhance the meaning of these stories.

In the previous example, the *related activities occur within a few hours* while John is at preschool, a relatively short span of time. Sometimes, *related activities may involve a larger span of time* - several days or weeks, or more. These stories may have titles like "When Mom and Dad Go to the Bahamas", "When I Am at Camp", or "Dad is Going to Boston". These stories focus on the general activities of others during the same period of time, how contact with these people will be maintained, and emphasize a shared conclusion: *when* and *how* everyone will return and be together again.

Sometimes, a sequence of activities will be completed by one or more people in preparation for a shared event. For example, Andrew is ten years old, and his birthday is this Friday. The family is getting together to help him celebrate. His aunt and uncle are flying in from Montana; Beth, his older sister, is taking the bus home from Kalamazoo College; Joe, Andrew's older brother, is driving from across town, and grandpa and grandma will be flying in from Florida. A Social Story for Andrew opens by introducing the topic of Andrew's birthday, and how a birthday dinner with his family is planned. In the body of the story, split pages describe the travel plans of each party. Next, a full page describes the following sequence: Andrew and his Dad will pick up Andrew's aunt, uncle, grandpa, and grandma at the airport. Next, they will pick up Beth from the

bus station, and return home. By that time, Joe will have arrived. The story closes on a full page with a description of the shared family experience: Andrew's birthday dinner. Another related Social Story could also be developed for Andrew to describe how everyone received his wish list (introduction, on a full page), their individual efforts in their home town to find a gift (body, on split pages), with a shared conclusion: everyone loves Andrew, and hopes he will enjoy the gift they selected. Other similar topics include the different and varied activities involved in preparing for the holidays, the creation of art projects for an art show, or the individual jobs of several students involved in a small group project.

The related activities of others do not have to be completely obvious, observable, or tangible; they may be more subtle, involving internal as well as external factors. For example, a Social Story may describe how different people may study for the same test (whole page), with very different results (split pages). A conclusion to this story may emphasize the importance and value of each person's best effort, regardless of the results. Or, writing the story differently, how people study using different methods (split pages) in preparation for the same test (single page). Similarly, a Split Section Social Story could describe the internal reactions of several different people in response to a single event - for example, hearing a joke, riding a roller coaster, or being around cats.

To check your understanding of topics that may be enhanced by a split section format, complete ***Exercise 6.***

Exercise 6: For each Social Story topic below, identify whether you would use a traditional (T) or split section (SS) format.

1. ____ *Jake's class is going to the zoo, and the goal of the story is to help Jake understand the general sequence of activities planned for that day.*

2. ____ *Jake's class is going to the zoo. His mother will be with one group of children, Jake will be with another. His mother has requested a story to help Jake understand that while she will be at the zoo with his class, she will not always be with Jake.*

3. ____ *Andrea feels her opinion is the only acceptable opinion. The goal of her story is to help Andrea understand how three people can experience the same thing, at the same time, with varied reactions.*

4. ____ *Desi needs a story to help him understand that mistakes are a part of learning.*

5. ____ *Annie is having a friend, Beth, sleep over night. Annie needs a story to help her understand that sometimes she should let Beth choose the activity.*

6. ____ *Kimberly needs a story to help her choose a recess activity.*

In summary, a Split Section Social Story uses a special format to enhance the accuracy and meaning of select Social Story topics. These stories use pages that are split horizontally to demonstrate that the information contained on the split pages occurs, or is considered, simultaneously. Topics suitable for a split section format fall into two basic categories: Social Stories about choices, and Social Stories about related activities. Their shared goal is to help students appreciate "the bigger picture" that is often an integral factor in understanding social interactions and events.

Workbook Summary and Exercise 7

The first Social Story was written for a kindergarten student to help him understand how to play a group game, *Charlie Over the Water*. The story yielded immediate, positive results. His success led to several additional Social Stories, and the development of three basic types of Social Story sentences, the Social Story Ratio, and guidelines for writing for students with A.S.D.. Collectively, they define what a Social Story is and how it should be written.

This workbook takes the initial discovery of Social Stories a step further; sharing some new ideas that can be used when writing and implementing Social Stories. Specifically, this self-instruction workbook introduces three new additions to the art of writing Social Stories: three new types of sentences (control, cooperative, and partial), stories about thoughts, and stories with split sections. Together, they provide a glimpse of the possibilities. They are the next steps toward defining the art of teaching social understanding with Social Stories.

This is the first Social Story Workbook, and those using it are the first to learn skills related to Social Stories using this type of format. As a result, the feedback from those completing this "take-out" style workshop is valuable. Take a few moments to complete ***Exercise 7*** on the following page, and send it to the address listed. The experiences, ideas, and suggestions resulting from Exercise 7 will be critical in the development of additional Social Story training materials.

References

Attwood, T. (1998). Asperger's Syndrome: *A Guide for Parents and Professionals*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Gray, C. A. (1994). *Comic Strip Conversations*. Arlington, Texas: Future Horizons.

Pfister, M. (1997). *Milo and the Magical Stones*. New York: North-South Books

Permission is hereby granted to copy this page for the purpose of completing Exercise 7.
This permission is restricted to ***page 20 only*** *of The Advanced Social Story Workbook.*

Exercise 7: Please help us develop additional Social Story training materials. Answer the following questions and send to the address at the bottom of this page. If possible, send us a sample of one of your stories as indicated in #5 .

1. Finish each statement by indicating *too easy* (E), *too difficult* (D), or understandable / *appropriate* (U):

In general, the text in this workbook is_____.
In general, the figures and examples provided in this workbook are_____.
In general, the exercises in this workbook are_____.

2. Finish each statement below with *agree* (A) or *disagree* (D):

In general, this workbook has given me ideas that I feel I will be able to use_____.
I believe I understand how to use the three new types of sentences confidently_____.
I believe I will use control, cooperative, and/or partial sentences in my Social Stories____.
I believe I understand how to write a Social Story about thoughts_____.
I believe I will write and implement Social Stories about thoughts_____.
I believe I understand how to develop a Split Section Social Story_____.
I believe I will write and implement Split Section Social Stories_____.
This format for learning new skills related to Social Stories is helpful_____.
I would like to see additional Social Story Workbooks_____.

3. Complete this section if you have attended a Social Story UnLimited™ workshop, according to the directions for #2:

I believe I could have learned the basics of writing Social Stories using this type of workbook format_____.
I believe in terms of learning skills related to Social Stories, a workbook is equivalent to a workshop____.

4. Your comments and ideas are important. Please feel free to write on the reverse side of this page or attach additional pages(s).

5. Include a sample of a story you have written using skills covered in this workbook.

6. Please send Exercise 7 to: Karen Lind, THE MORNING NEWS, Jenison Public Schools, 2140 Bauer Road, Jenison, MI 49428. Or FAX 616 - 457 - 8442.

Thank you!

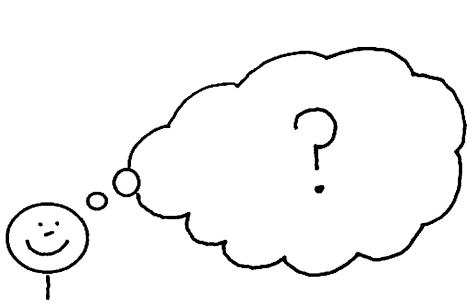
Answer Appendix

Exercise 1 (p. 4): 1. di, 2. p, 3. co, 4. cl, 5. di, 6. di, 7. di, 8. de

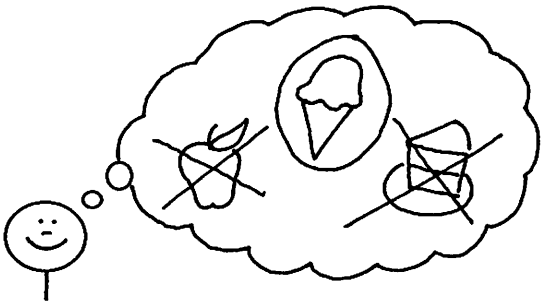
Discussion: #1, #6, and #7 may require some clarification. Directive sentences do not have to contain the phrases "I will try" or "I will work on". If the word "will" or the phrase "will try to" can be inserted into a sentence, and it still makes sense, it is a directive sentence. For example, in #1: Sometimes I *will* eat vegetables, sometimes I *will* eat meat. In #1, #6, and #7 above, the directive is implied. These are not good directive sentences, and the use of implied directives - especially in reference to eating or sensory issues, is not consistent with the goal to maintain a patient and reassuring quality throughout a social story.

Exercise 2 (p. 4): Answer appears in the text at the top of page 5.

Exercise 3 (p. 6):



guess: An idea missing some facts or information. Scientists *guess*, and then gather more information. Other people make *guesses* about many things, like the weather. I can *guess*, too.



decide: To make a choice among ideas. Sometimes, I can see what a person *decides* by looking at what that person *does*. I make *decisions*. Other people make *decisions*.

Exercise 4 (p. 8): Completed with individual ideas.

Exercise 5 (p. 9): Many answers are possible. Suggested answers appear in italics.

1. **Babies** know about *eating, sleeping,* and *comfort.*
2. **Teachers** know about *children, fairness,* and *academics.*
3. **Store clerks** know about *making change, merchandise,* and *pricing.*
4. **Grandpas** know about *grandchildren, events of long ago,* and *about Mom* (Dad).
5. **Veterinarians** know about *dogs, cats,* and *other animals.*
6. **Substitutes** know about *children, the plans for the day,* and *the classroom schedule.*
7. **Truck drivers** know about *safety, reading maps,* and *driving.*
8. **Moms** know about *me, our family,* and *her job.*
9. **The paper boy** knows about *delivering newspapers, keeping accounts,* and *who is on his route.*
10. **I know about**_____, _____, _____.

Exercise 6 (p. 18): 1. T, 2. SS, 3. SS, 4. T, 5. T

THE MORNING NEWS

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