



It's a story about respite care. Is it a Social Story?
First project with a surprise ending.

Carol's Club

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members

The Request

I recently completed a two-day Social Story workshop in Nanaimo, British Columbia on Vancouver Island in Canada. What a gorgeous place! It was an attentive audience with a fun sense of humor. Angela was among them. She was among the first to arrive each day and secured her spot at the front. A participant with a mission. We chatted during

the breaks. Angela showed me a small book that she had created for her son about respite care. I gave her some ideas and, along with what she learned at the workshop, she revised her story. Shortly after that, as a new Carol's Club member, she submitted her revised respite Story and asked, "Is this a Social Story?"

July 28, 2018

Hi Carol,

What a pleasure to meet you last week at your Nanaimo conference! There was much more to developing Social Stories than I realized.

I was the mom at the front table who showed up early, and you had a look at my social story attempt that I made on my own before your seminar. My behavioural consultant gave me the idea and support to develop one because Nathan, my 6-year-old son was having so much difficulty transitioning to and from respite care that I thought it would be better to just cancel my respite care; it drained me more than it rejuvenated me.

Once I developed this booklet and read it to my son a few times, and he read it on his own and packed it in his suitcase to respite, it changed everything! So here is the updated version post-seminar. Would you be willing to review it for me and let me know if you would suggest any further changes? As you read it, it might help you to know that my son was refusing to have a bath at respite as well as having some problems when Sue needed to say "No" to him. Adding those components to my story have helped resolve those concerns as well. I tweaked my original wording post-seminar to try and reflect what I learned. Please let me know if I'm on the right track. Thanks so much!

Angela

The Project

Angela, you are on the right track!

First, to determine if your story is a Social Story, I need to know how information was gathered and how the topic was identified. It would seem that the stress of going to and from respite care would make identifying the topic obvious: You need a story about respite care. I believe that you recognized this early on. If a topic is too large, it may cause you to write about things that are irrelevant or to miss opportunities to discuss those that are critical. Talking with Nathan gave him early involvement in the Story process and helped to identify two issues: 1) bathing at respite care,

and 2) being told “no.” It also resulted in a few story pages about family pets, etc., that - while seemingly a bit off topic - are very important to Nathan and wisely included in the story. You have met the second Social Story criterion that requires us to gather information and identify the topic - in that order - always with our audience in mind. You’re off to a good start!

Thanks, Angela, for sharing the final version of your story with other members. It’s included as a separate document with this project. It’s interesting - I started this project by gathering information. Same as any Social Story author as they begin work. And have to stick with the original question. My focused topic is: Is it a Social Story? I will do my very best to address the question, and limit the side trips.

You’ve done an excellent job gathering information for the story! I always check the eighth criterion next. It’s a division problem that yields a critical number called the Story Rating. It ensures that every Social Story “describes more than directs.” Dividing the total number of Descriptive Sentences by the total number of Control Sentences needs to yield a quotient of 2 or more. Including your photo captions in the count, you have a total of fifty-six Descriptive and three Coaching Sentences. Your story has a Story Rating of 17.667. If it meets the remaining criteria, you have a genuine Social Story!

You have nailed the fourth criterion, FOURmat! Your document prints out and folds into a small book. It’s a perfect kid-friendly format that will travel well from home to respite. The fourth criterion requires us to use illustrations that are clear and meaningful to the audience. I did not see any problems with the photographs. (Just one suggestion to include an adult in the photo with the kids at the beach - underscoring the importance of adult supervision.) Your photographs are up to the task, I believe, and I love how you involved Nathan.

Moving on to the text, I’ve printed it in boldface italics below. My comments follow each page of text. Blue font indicates captions for photo illustrations.

Pages 1-2

I am going to respite care on _____ . Mommy will pick me up _____ .

Tom & Sue live here. I am going to respite care to stay at Tom and Sue’s home. They live in Timbuctoo near the fish park.

Comments: I like the simple calendar. The sentence, “Mommy will pick me up” is a Coaching Sentence that describes what mom will do. If the sentence applied to the audience, “I will try” would be used instead of “I will.” In this case, though, I think “I will” works fine. Nathan may feel a little unsure about the situation if

it read, "My mom will try to pick me up!" I think it is okay and preferable in this case because the odds are very high that mom will be there! I also like your fill in the blank format that allows you to indicate day and time, as you described in our communication (I can sure tell you've attended a Social Story workshop!): *Just to clarify, the line below this sentence is where I print the date and time I will pick him up. Sometimes I say for example, "Mommy will pick me up on Saturday after gymnastics." rather than a time, I use a timeframe. If I use a time, I will insert "about" before the time.*

Pages 3-4

This is Tom & Sue. They know me and the things that I like.

Respite is a short period of rest. When I have my special time with Tom and Sue, Mommy can have a time of rest at home or at one of her activities.

When I get ready to visit Tom and Sue, I will pack 3 things that are special to me. These will help comfort me while I am away from home.

I always like to bring Felix with me.

Comments: You made me laugh... or it's a better guess is that Nathan did! More on that in a second. First, I did stop at the phrase "I will" in reference to packing three things that comfort him away from home. Social Story terminology would be "I will try..." or it may sound better as, "I may take 3 things." However, Nathan helped in writing the Story, and I believe these may be his sentences. As a parental co-author in your shoes, if that is the case, I sure would not correct him or write it in any other way. Nathan has me re-thinking "I will try" over "I will" requirement. What if it is a sentence generated by the audience? I'm not making any decisions about that here. But Nathan has me thinking. Sensing Nathan was the author through here, I loved the last sentence, "I always like to bring Felix with me." I am sure I could place a very safe bet that Felix is never forgotten.

Pages 5-6

I love to laugh with my mommy.

When we are apart, mommy says she misses me, but she is okay. She says she smiles when she thinks about us being back together again after respite.

This is Kiki and Pippy. They don't hide from me anymore. They now love me and get to know me.

Comments: The cat pages! I love the sentences describing what you do when you miss Nathan. They are great modeling sentences. The last three sentences - and especially the last - I'm hearing Nathan as the author again. He's delightful and quite good at writing Descriptive Sentences.

Pages 7-8

This is Poppy. He always eats my Cheerios every morning. I don't like that. But I still love Poppy.

I sometimes play Lego with my friend John.

Comments: Initially, the last four pages seemed off topic to me. I wanted your story to stay on topic. I quickly abandoned that thought with respect for Nathan as co-author. Immediately following the description of strategies that you use when you miss Nathan, we're introduced to the Kiki, Pippy, Poppy, and John. Nathan has written fun, comfortable, positive home-based thoughts on these pages and you've added photos to reinforce every one of them. If I was a child at respite, I think that seeing familiar pets and people and reading my own positive words would be very reassuring!

Pages 9-10

This is my friend Sally. Sue takes us to the beach in the summer.

Sue lets me cuddle her stuffy that I call Wolf Cutie.

I like watching PBS Kids and building my Lego models.

Mmmm....Sue makes my favourite pasta!

Pages 11-12

I sometimes play at the fish park or swim in John and Sally's pool next door.

Sometimes Sue drives me to my gymnastics class on Saturdays.

Comments: The comfort continues, and the context has changed - we're with Sue now. The good times and feelings continue.

Pages 13-14

Once Tom & Sue took me to visit Santa at Kidz Club.

I am growing up. More and more I like to do things by myself.

But some things are too hard or not safe to do by myself.

I can ask Tom & Sue for help because they know me and want to help me.

Comments: Positive times and thoughts as a backdrop to this point, the story takes a turn to more serious issues on page 14. I like the sentences about growing up, that represent Nathan's vantage point about supervision during bath time and accepting correction from adults. The word "can" is always used with caution. "May" might be better in the last sentence. "Can" is fine if asking for help is a skill that Nathan has demonstrated with Tom and Sue or if these are his words. I love how this section closes with a reminder that his caregivers want to help him. Sentences that describe the perspective of others provide essential information and in some cases a logical rationale for behavior that may otherwise be confusing.

A note to other Carol's Club members: Angela reviewed a draft of this project before distribution. I thought you might be interested in her comments:

Absolutely agreed. I should change the word "I can ask Tom and Sue for help..." to "I may ask...". Thanks for noticing how the detail of one word has such an impact on the intended meaning. If I understand

correctly, using "may" would provide Nathan an option/solution if he needs help, he may ask his caregiver for help. Whereas using "can" seems to mean more about him having the ability to ask.

I'd like to thank Angela for so aptly summarizing one of the differences between using 'can' and 'may'! Still, Social Stories do allow the use of 'can' for abilities that have been demonstrated. Also, I think children may use the word 'can' with more of an optional meaning ("Yes, I *can* ride my bike now!"), associating 'may' with something that opens a request for permission from an adult. As we grow, it seems that "can" takes on a more definitive meaning and 'may' becomes associated with choice. Bottom line: Use caution with 'can.'

Pages 15-16

I like to have a bath by myself. Washing my face and soaping my whole body helps keep me clean and healthy.

This is my privacy curtain so Sue can still help me have a bath, but doesn't see me. She might ask me questions to make sure I am okay. I can answer her to let her know.

This is my bed that I sleep in.

I'm just pretending to be asleep in this picture.

Comments: Beautiful! The previous pages introduced the issue of growing up and being able to do things independently versus still needing supervision. These pages provide a practical example - a solution that provides safe supervision and respects Nathan's growing need for privacy. I LOVE the accuracy of the last sentence. It's a picture of me sleeping... sort of. I'm pretending. The look on his face suggests that he is also having a good time.

Angela has a question about my comments here:

I have a question about the word 'can' in, "I can answer her to let her know." Is the word 'can' appropriate here? I'm pondering when to use can, may, will try, etc. When I replace with "may" or "will try" it sounds too optional for him. I'm tempted to use the word 'will' because I think it is important in this situation that he answer his caregiver. But perhaps 'can' is a good choice of words as it sounds less rule-driven. Your thoughts?

To answer Angela's question, I need to explain the history behind why "I will" is never used in the first person (audience) voice. When we were first developing Social Stories, it was noticed that "I will" would often raise stress and subsequently intense feelings of failure. A child would read, "I will finish my math assignment," really try only to be told that it was time for recess. But the story said, "I will...!" By using "I will try" the stress lessened, and the emphasis was placed on the effort where it belongs. When safety is a factor, though, the use of "will try" falls short, as in the sentence, "I will try to keep my seat belt fastened." Our child in the car seat may unbuckle the belt, making "I will try" more accurate but lacking in the intensity that we'd like it to have.

Descriptive sentences to the rescue! Formerly referred to as Affirmative Sentences, what we can do is use the phrase "I will try..." or "I will work on..." followed by, "This is very important" or "This is very important to my safety." In Nathan's story, I would use something like, "*This is my privacy curtain so Sue can still help me have a bath, but doesn't see me. It's Sue's job to keep me safe. She might ask me questions to make sure I am okay. I will try to answer each question. This is very important. Knowing I am okay, Sue can*

remain where she is on the other side of my privacy curtain.” You could also add, perhaps in another story as this one is long enough already, “That’s how we work together for bath time safety.”

Pages 17-18

I am a good helper! I help at Tom and Sue’s house too.

Sometimes Tom and Sue say “No” to me. Sometimes my Mommy says “No” to me. This is okay.

This is me hugging Felix. He is so soft and helps me feel better.

Comments: I have made a quick correction, and I am looking the other way! You’ve got great ‘spot on’ paragraphs throughout this story. I believe the three sentences about when adults say ‘no’ belong in the same paragraph, too. Especially when “This is okay” closes the thought. It loses its meaning as a sentence on its own.

Pages 19-20

My mommy will pick me up from respite care. We will be together again. It is good manners to say thank you to Tom and Sue before I go out the door.

After my mommy picks me up, I can open my Surprise Bag to see my welcome home treat.

This is a nice time to tell my mommy about my time at respite. My Mommy can tell me about her time too.

This is me and my mommy when we are together.

Made with Love by Mommy and Son

Comments: The ‘can - may’ thoughts return! In this case, I’d use ‘may.’ I bet opening a surprise is within Nathan’s skill set, though! The use of ‘can’ is within Social Story boundaries. You may want to include a time frame for pick up as well in the story.

Summary

I have learned so very much from Angela, Nathan, and this story. The question is, “Is this a Social Story?” We all know and abide by the ten Social Story criteria. It would seem then, that the answer to the question, “Is this a Social Story” is pretty straightforward. Does it meet the criteria or not? I’ve spent some time thinking about that. As I have pointed out, there are small deviations from the criteria here and there. And, it has to have a title. So, it is close to meeting every requirement, but it is not a Social Story.

Yes, it is. I’m as surprised as any Club member may be. Or, maybe you caught my mistake all along. This is definitely a Social Story - and an excellent one at that - entering the Ninth Criterion: Nine to Refine.

Look at Angela’s initial request. She never asks if her story is a Social Story. She’s in the middle of the Ninth Criterion that requires us to review and revise until it meets all applicable Social Story Criteria. The best way to do that is to seek feedback from others. Angela asks if she is on the right track and if I am willing to review her story and suggest further changes. [Angela isn’t done with the story!](#)

There's a boat that I missed somewhere. According to our latest communication, Angela is making each revision as I complete this project. Angela is right in step with her recent Social Story training. I, on the other hand, am learning that abandoning all assumptions means *reading* without them as well.

I've mentioned the work of Dr. Siobhan Timmins many times. She is a physician and the mother of Mark, a son with autism. Siobhan has written Social Stories for him most of his life. Her books contain Mark's Stories and Social Articles, as well as detailed descriptions of the process surrounding each one. With Siobhan's work, I have always suspected that there is something extremely valuable and intangible that happens when parents write Social Stories. Angela is another case in point. When a parent's love picks up a pen (or computer) to write a Social Story, words are chosen with incredible care. Personal second-guessing leads to a series of deletes and re-writes that reach into the night. A Story initiated at the break of dawn is still in progress long past bedtime when the only light in the room is from a computer screen. Parents are relentless in the pursuit of Social Story perfection even though I am unsure as to what that might look like. In an early communication with me in preparation for this project, Angela noted, "Maybe I will someday be the Canadian version of Siobhan Timmins!" Same soccer team, that's for sure. Play ball!

My comments are finished, and I can assure you, this is this very genuine Social Story, with my warmest congratulations to co-authors Angela and Nathan. In fact, I am sure I'll be receiving a new version from Angela soon and I will share it with you.

