



Back to School Social Stories! Don't leave home without 'em.

# Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

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

## The Project

Welcome to Carol's Club! I hate to refer to summer in the past tense, but the reality is that for many of us it is drawing to a close. I hope you have had fun during the past three months.

Carol's Club member, Fiona, would like feedback on three \*Stories that she has written about going to school for her son, Ben. Fiona's stories are brilliant, with few revisions needed to meet all of the Story Story criteria.

*\*Using the capital 'S' in 'Story' refers to a genuine Social Story. For ease of writing and reading, and because Fiona's stories are so very close to meeting all of the Social Story criteria, I will be referring to all of Fiona's Stories with the capital 'S.'*

September is just around the corner. Many children in the northern hemisphere will be heading back to school soon. With this project, I am adding a Story to Fiona's set of Stories. Our Stores are saved in PDF as well as WORD format to allow you to revise and personalize them. A brief discussion accompanies each Story. For convenience, I've included the text for all of the Stories here, followed by a discussion of each. I encourage you to refer to the complete versions (PDF/WORD) included with this project. In your latest MailChimp email, I have included links to Stories from previous Carol's Club projects and Storymovies that may be helpful for children heading back to school.

## 1. Introducing/Explaining the Educational Team

There's a lot to like about Fiona's first Story, "Who is on my school team and what do they know about me?"

*Who is on my school team and what they know about me?*

*My name is Ben. I am seven years old. I'm learning about who is on my school team.*

*A team is a group of people who work together. A school team is a group of teachers that work together to help children learn. They help children get along with other children, too.*

*My school team is Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Wright, Mrs. Donaldson, Mrs. Andrews, Mrs. Carson, Mr. Buning, and my class TAs.*

*My school team knows about me.*

*My school team knows that I like Pokémon.*

*My school team knows that I like playing games on the laptop.*

*My school team knows that I like swimming.*

*My school team knows that I like dinosaurs.*

*My school team knows that I have two safe spaces in school that I may use when I need to take a break.*

*My school team knows that I don't like people bumping into me.*

*When I need help at school, I may ask one of my school team. My school team will be pleased to help me.*

*A school team is a group of teachers that work together to help children*

*learn and to help children get along. I'm learning about who is on my school team.*

Discussion: This is a great Story! At first glance, I like the kid-friendly Comic Sans font. Ben is the narrator and the Story opens with his name - a great way to recruit his attention - followed by a to-the- point topic sentence.

Introduction of the school staff includes a short description of what is meant by the word 'team.' After all, this is not a soccer, surgical, or debate team! I love the illustration with the border around all of Ben's school staff. It underscores the connection and purpose that they share. The Story continues with a detailed list of what the school team knows about Ben, and that they are happy to help him. The repetitive format of the list is reassuring (see my additional comments about the list below). The Story closes with a clear summary.

To meet the Social Story requirement for accuracy (fifth criterion) rephrase the sentence, "My school team will be pleased to help me," with "Anyone (or Each person) on my school team will be pleased to help me." It is unlikely the entire team will come to Ben's aide.

Ideas:

- To acknowledge the variety of meanings of the word "team" the sentences about what the team knows may be combined into one paragraph that opens with, "There are many kinds of teams."
- The school team is not clairvoyant. How do they know so much about Ben? That's a little scary. For many children, it will be essential to include information about why the team has so much personal information. It's also vital to child safety and future discussions about strangers. The problem is solved with a simple sentence to open the list, "My parents told my teachers about me; what I like and don't like."
- If a shorter Story is needed, combining the list of what the team knows may be reworked into two sentences, the first listing what Ben likes, the second listing what he does not like, or...
- Keep the list as it is and place each item on a separate page with a thought symbol connecting to all of the staff pictured at the bottom. For example, put a picture of Ben swimming in a collective thought symbol with the text below, "My school team knows that I like swimming." For safety, make sure any photos or drawings that depict swimming include an adult in the water with Ben.

Fiona has laid the groundwork for the following story about assistance.

## 2. Assistance in the Classroom

Fiona's second Story. "Who helps me in the classroom?" is again so close to meeting all of the Social Story criteria, right out of the box! Here's the text:

*Who helps me in the classroom?*

*My name is Ben. I am seven years old. I am in year two at school.*

*Children go to school to learn new things. Sometimes learning new things is easy and happens straight away. Sometimes children need help to understand and learn.*

*Teachers help children to learn and to understand. Teachers know how to help children get along with other children too.*

*Usually, my teachers are Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wright.*

*In Daffodil class, there are also teaching assistants. A teaching assistant can be called a TA for short.*

*A TAs job is to help children learn too. TAs often take small groups of children out of a class for a short time to help them with their work. Sometimes TAs change as they work with other schools. This is ok.*

*Usually the TA's in my class are Mrs. Johnson, Ms. Davis, name/photo of the other TA to follow.*

*Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wright know about me and how to help me understand and learn. Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Wright know how to help me get along with other children too.*

*The TAs know about me. The TAs know how to help me understand and learn. The TAs know how to help me get along with other children too.*

*When I need help, I may ask my teacher or the TA. My teacher or TA will be pleased to help me.*

*I am learning about help in the classroom.*

Discussion: I recall writing Stories on this topic many times. As if helping children with autism understand and recruit assistance isn't enough, including teaching assistants and other school staff in that concept adds to the challenge. I like how Fiona builds concepts! In this case, she introduces 'assistance' towards the close of the first Story, picking it up with more detail in the next. She also uses the identical sentence in more than one Story to create a link between them. Within each Story, there's a cohesive 'flow' from one idea to another. Fiona's patience is apparent. She explains what is meant by each potentially new word or term first, before using it in the context of the text. She's a natural at writing Social Stories!

The sentence, "Sometimes TAs change as they work in other schools is not literally accurate. How do the TAs change as they are working in those other schools? Clarification is needed to meet the requirements of the fifth Social Story criteria. Rephrasing the sentence minimizes possible confusion, as in, "Many TAs work in more than one school. This is okay. This is why I work with (two/three) TAs."

Ideas:

- For some audiences, it may help to drop the phrase 'new things' from the first and second lines of the second paragraph. The word 'new' may cause needless anxiety and the meaning of 'things' may (though may not) be ambiguous.

- I have often heard the phrase 'straight away' used in the United Kingdom and Canada; less frequently in the United States. If Ben understands its meaning, and especially if he uses it correctly in context himself, it's okay to use in this Story. If there is any doubt, I'd replace the phrase with 'quickly' or simply end the sentence after 'easy.'
- Consider clarifying 'get along' with 'work and play' and making the statements in this paragraph more general, "TAs know how to help children understand and learn. The TAs know how to help children work and play together."

Nicely done!

### 3. A Safe Place for Big Feelings at School

Fiona is tackling another frequent topic with, "My safe place at school." Here's the text:

#### *My safe place at school*

*My name is Ben. I am seven years old. I go to school.*

*A safe place is a place someone can use when they need to take a break if they are close to a number five feeling.*

*Many people use a safe place to take a break to calm down until they feel just right again.*

*In my school, I have two safe places.*

*There is a safe place in Daffodil class.*

*There is a safe place in Mrs. Green's and Mr. Thompson's office.*

#### *PHOTOS OF OFFICE AND CLASS PLACES*

*I may go to one of these safe places when I feel I need to take a break.*

*When I feel just right again, I will try and re-join my class. My teachers will be pleased when I try and re-join the class.*

*A safe place is a place someone can use when they need to take a break if they are close to a number five feeling.*

Discussion: Another great Story! I'm assuming Ben is familiar with the meaning of "close to a number 5 feeling." It may be a scale developed for him or more likely it refers to "The Incredible Five Point Scale" by Buron & Curtis (on

Amazon [https://www.amazon.com/Incredible-Point-Scale-Significantly-Understanding/dp/1937473074/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1534855608&sr=8-1&keywords=the+incredible+five+point+scale](https://www.amazon.com/Incredible-Point-Scale-Significantly-Understanding/dp/1937473074/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1534855608&sr=8-1&keywords=the+incredible+five+point+scale)). The term 'just right' is used in reference to feeling

calm/comfortable/under Ben's control. Again, if this is a familiar and meaningful term for Ben, I would keep it in the Story. If not, I would change it to one of the more 'generic' terms I've used above. There is no mention of any procedure for Ben to use to access his safe places. Ben may not need permission to go to his safe place in the classroom. How does he access his safe place in Mrs. Green's and Mr. Thompson's office? This needs to be at least mentioned in this Story and perhaps covered in more detail in a subsequent one. Overall, this is a well-constructed Story that approaches a problematic topic with characteristic Social Story respect, patience and quiet, centered confidence.

Ideas:

- 'Returning' to class may be perceived as easier to do after being upset than 'rejoining' it.
- It may be helpful to develop another Story describing calming choices or strategies to use when in the safe place.
- Consider writing Stories describing each number on the scale with personalized calming strategies to maintain or regain control and comfort.

#### 4. Moving from One Grade to the Next

Discussion: I began with a goal to write a sample Social Story about returning to school. In the process, I made some discoveries about the phrases that we use in conversations about the beginning of a school year.

For many children, heading back to school is exciting and at the same time a little anxiety-producing. Parents and professionals try to accent the positives and reassure their children or clients at the same time. Paying attention to the words that we use - and the risk of confusion due to literal interpretation- can enhance adult efforts for a smooth return to the classroom.

When regarded at face value, the term 'new teacher' is not only scary - it's misleading. There is little that is new about even a first-year teacher. He or she has been around for about twenty-something years, studied at university with coursework that includes work in a variety of contexts with students. What we *mean* by 'new teacher' is that it is a person that is new to the student. Even that isn't entirely accurate, as in many cases students have seen and may know quite a bit about their 'new' teacher. To students with and without autism, 'new' is frequently associated with unfamiliar or foreign. With the Social Story goal of sharing accurate information meaningfully - in this case, to reassure and reduce anxiety - 'new' may not be the best choice of words.

The same goes for the phrase, 'back to school.' Many words and phrases that contain 'back' are undesirable or negative, like 'back of the line (or room),' 'backwards,' 'back-handed' (as in 'back-handed compliment'), 'we'll have to take it back' (in reference to a return), 'backlog,' or 'take it back' (in response to a hurtful statement). In a board game, going 'back' often means being sent to an earlier position and a loss of progress or diminishing odds of success. As a word, 'back' has a going-in-reverse sort of reputation, and may also be ill-advised in reference to the start of school.

Seemingly straightforward Social Story topics often hold unique twists and turns. That has been the case with the following Story, "I'll have a second-grade teacher." The phrases 'new teacher' and 'back to school' do not appear, and I've used a repetitive text to build a reassuring and predictable tone. I tried to share information about the bigger picture - that is, the process of growing up and moving through the educational system with a variety of teachers on the way. For a shorter version of the Story, delete the paragraphs about summer break. Similar to Fiona's Stories, I've included the Story in PDF and WORD formats.

*I'll have a second-grade teacher!*

*My name is Ann. I'm seven years old. I'm a student. I have gone to school for three years. I've had three teachers. As I grow, I'll have more.*

*Mrs. Grayson was my pre-school teacher. Mrs. Grayson knows all about pre-school students and what they need to learn.*

*In the summer, I went to daycare and played. I went with my family to the beach a lot. I did other things, too.*

*Mr. Barnes was my kindergarten teacher. He knows all about kindergarteners and what they need to learn.*

*In the summer, I went to daycare and played. I went with my family to the beach a lot. I did other things, too.*

*Miss McMahon was my first-grade teacher. She knows all about first graders and what they need to learn.*

*It's summer now. I go to daycare. I play. I go with my family to the beach a lot. I do other things, too.*

*Soon I will go to second grade. Mrs. Anderson will be my teacher. She knows all about second graders and what they need to learn.*

*I'm Ann, and I'm seven years old. I'm a student. I've had three teachers and I'll have many more.*

If you live in the northern hemisphere, I wish you the very best for a productive school year. I look forward to working with Carol's Club Members!

