

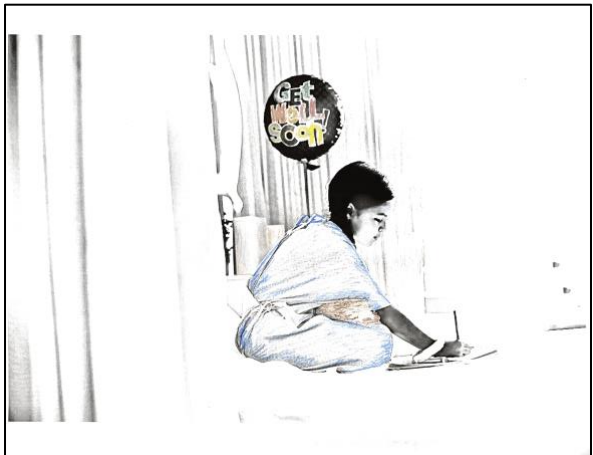


The First Coloring Story

A short while ago, I sent an email to Carol's Club members asking for examples of anxiety-producing situations. Thank you for your responses. I will be using your experiences in future projects.



Among the emails that I received, is a request from the father of an eleven-year-old daughter, Angie. Angie has growing apprehension about an upcoming surgery and hospital stay. Dad wants to write Social Stories for her, but needs models to use as guides. He asked for Social Stories about what to expect, and what it is like to stay in a hospital. In the process of working with Dad, I discovered something.



After gathering information from Dad, I decided to write a Story for Angie using the new coloring pages format. Initially, I was going to address Angie's anxiety via a "traditional" topic, like how patients eat in a hospital or things to do to pass the time, topics similar to those that Dad initially identified. Then I found a photo (top left) of a young girl coloring in a hospital bed (Depositphotos.com.).

I made a black and white photo from the original, gradually lightening it until it looked more like a coloring page than a photo. There are apps available that transform photos into coloring pages. I tried two of them. I was happier with the results working within the photo editing in my computer. I began coloring the illustration. Within a short time, the topic and text became apparent.

If I was a young girl in a hospital, where so much is determined by others, I'd appreciate having information about routines and what to expect, like Angie's Dad has identified. Emotionally, I think I would also appreciate a little control - and that became my topic. The resulting Story, "The Colors are Up to Me" is in the Appendix. I sent the Story to Dad. Once Angie is in the hospital, Dad plans to use the Story as a model, following the same process that I did to create a coloring page from a photo of his daughter in her hospital room and personalizing the text.

Story completed, I realized I had developed it in reverse, gathering information first as always, but then working backward - beginning with an illustration before identifying my specific topic and writing the text. What intrigued me is that working from a coloring page first, and maybe the process of coloring itself, introduced me to an important topic that otherwise I may have missed. Or, if I had identified it and used a more traditional form of Social Story illustration, I would have written the Story differently. With coloring pages, there is an opportunity for illustration to actively involve the Audience, with text working in support the process.

Coloring Stories Raise New Questions

As I mentioned, when I write Stories in response to a new, anxiety producing situation, my "default" approach is to describe the situation. That's why I was right in step with Angie's Dad when he asked for Story models to describe his daughter's stay in the hospital. For years, I have advised Authors to describe that which is causing distress, from fire alarms, air hand dryers, sewer plants, and vacuum cleaners - to birthday parties, a first day at school or on the job, or explaining that "The Custodian Does Not Use Overhead Projectors to Keep Spiders Out of the Restroom."

Sometimes working backward is the best way to explore what lies ahead. Like when you exit a museum by retracing the steps of your route and it seems like you are encountering exhibits for the first time. You notice things that didn't catch your attention on the way in.

I have some new questions. For example, for years I've advised parents and professionals that in a Comic Strip Conversation color is used strictly for the words that people say or think. We never "color things in." The rationale is to keep the focus on words and their un-stated meanings (the feelings that accompany words and give them meaning), to increase the chances of gaining insight into what is motivating a current response, and of course to keep a conversation moving "on topic," avoiding the time involved in coloring or additional details.

A few days into working with Coloring Stories, I found myself rethinking and (possibly) reframing that advice. Could coloring images after the conclusion of a Comic Strip Conversation do any harm? If a child continued to use the colors in terms of their associated meanings, might we learn something more? And, if they didn't, might coloring a

drawing - especially of an anxiety-producing situation or one where events took an unexpected or negative turn - help a child, adolescent, or adult gain a sense of control or improved understanding? As I did, discovering the topic for Angie's Story while coloring its illustration. Minimally, I am wondering if coloring a Comic Strip Conversation after its conclusion - or even as a part of the process - may prove to be beneficial.

Needless to say, I am gathering information on coloring pages. If you decide to use them, I would love to hear about our experiences. I believe that Coloring Stories may introduce us to topics that we previously may have missed, and I am hopeful that they will make a significant contribution to the ever-evolving art and science of Social Stories.

The Appendix begins on the following page.

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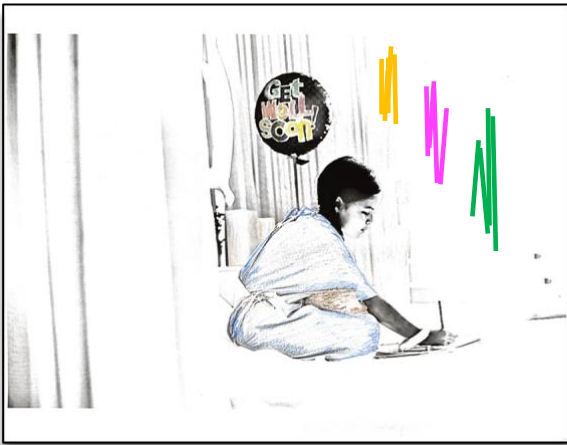
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The Colors are Up to Me



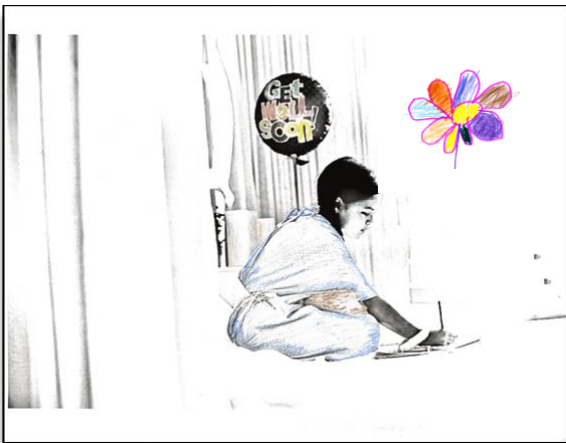
This is my hospital room and bed. The curtains are blue. The sheets are white. When I color, I may change it if I like.



I may make the curtains any color, like pink, yellow, or green.

The color of my hospital gown is "up to me."

That means I decide what it will be.



I may draw a flower or two or three.

When I color my room it's up to me.

