



Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members - March 26, 2019

The Request

Andrew, a Carol's Club member, is the father of a nine-year-old son, Logan. Logan is diagnosed with autism; a bright, enthusiastic kid with lots of great ideas. Logan loves fish, dinosaurs, and Legos and would like to be an engineer or architect someday. Good careers for an idea person! They are also careers that require a practical understanding of how to work with others. Compared to previous school years, small group assignments are increasing. Logan has difficulty considering and using ideas that are not his - and is quite expressive about how he loathes small group assignments. Andrew's request is for Social Stories or Social Articles "about teamwork" to use as models.

Background

As is the case with every Social Story, I began by gathering information. I had the opportunity to talk at length to Andrew on the phone. A year ago, Andrew attended one of my Social Story workshops. He's unsure where to start; writing Stories about teamwork is not easy. Andrew is seeking a few Stores to use as inspiration, models to help him "...get those first words on paper." Logan is in the gifted program at his school, writes and reads very well, and as mentioned, is quite expressive on many fronts!

There's a lot to gain with teamwork. Students working together "...show increased individual achievement compared to students working alone" (The Teaching Center, 2016, p. 1). It does make sense - the more people that you have working toward a goal - whether solving a challenging math or science problem or bringing a teammate home from third base - you have got a broader base of knowledge and experience that increases the likelihood of success. The benefits extend beyond the classroom. About 80% of the workforce work in group settings. Employers seek employees who can work effectively with others toward a common goal.

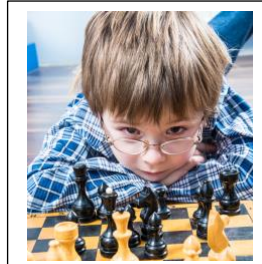
To many students, small group work is a severe and frustrating loss of an opportunity and control. An article by Ethan Hirschberg provides a first-hand account of working on a small group project (Hirschberg, 2018). Ethan is on the autism spectrum and from what I can tell from the article is in high school. His article opens with, "Let me just start out by saying that I absolutely hate group work!" (Hirschberg, p. 1). Ethan includes a list of reasons why he hates group work; he has difficulty with social skills and would prefer to make all project decisions. Working as part of a group doesn't divide the workload for Ethan as it does for his peers, it increases it. It creates a sense of loss of academic and creative license, as well as the loss of an opportunity to escape into the details of a project without interference or second-guessing from others. Ethan's article is an eye-opener and contains a description of a sensory-based situation that ensues and how he effectively resolves it.

Teamwork is a concept with many faces - never exactly the same twice. Last April 9th I placed a project in the ClubHouse titled, "Behind Every Great Social Story is a Concept." It included a case example and Story titled, "The Toothpaste Team" (see Figure 1 on the following page). The Story was originally developed for Trevor, age 7, to increase his motivation for toothbrushing. George, a fictional character in the Story, is the final guy in the Toothpaste Team, a group of people working together with relay-style teamwork to make a tube of toothpaste and get it to George's bathroom in time for toothbrushing. Trevor has long reported to anyone who will listen that the most important person in a relay is the "final guy" - the person who carries that baton over the finish line. In fact, when Trevor grows up, he wants to be the final guy in a relay race. There's an unseen team at work to get the tools of tooth brushing to George. And they all need George to do his part for their efforts to be worthwhile and successful.

Figure 1: “The Toothpaste Team” is written in reverse sequence to recruit Trevor’s attention early in the Story with mention of the main character as the coveted anchorman on the Toothpaste Team.

The Toothpaste Team

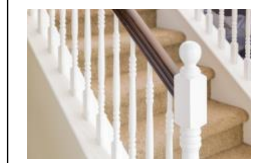
This is a picture of George. George is the anchor of his Toothpaste Team. He’s the anchor in an important toothpaste relay.



Tooth brushing begins with squeezing a tube of toothpaste. Toothpaste comes out of a tube onto a toothbrush. George has toothpaste because...



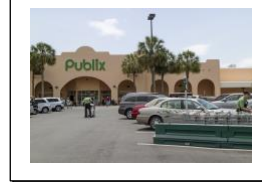
George’s sister, Jenny, carried it from the kitchen up the stairs to the bathroom. The toothpaste was in the kitchen because...



Mom carried the groceries into the kitchen from the car. The groceries were in the car because ...



Dad bought the toothpaste at the grocery store. The toothpaste was in the grocery store because...



Many people hundreds of miles away made the toothpaste and put it on trucks that brought it to the store.



George is the anchor of a relay with hundreds of people working together as part of George’s Toothpaste Team.



The teamwork depicted in Trevor’s Story is very different from the cooperation within a small group project. In “The Toothpaste Team” the main character, George, does not need to interact with his teammates - despite their shared

effort to keep George's teeth clean. There is a clear delineation of roles - where one person's job stops the other begins in pure relay style.

Like George's team, Logan's team has a goal, and they need to work together to achieve it. The distinction is that Logan's team will need to work together to establish roles and boundaries and coordinate their efforts until their classroom project is completed. Context is everything. Setting out to write about teamwork is to enter a vast and never-ending jungle of concepts and skills. To minimize frustration, we need a topic that will create some boundaries. From this point on, teamwork is out, working in a small group is in.

One more thing I realized as I looked at the difference between a relay-type effort and working together on a small group project. In "The Toothpaste Team, our main character, George, plays a heroic anchor role by simply brushing his teeth. There's no heroic ending for Logan, no critical solo performance. Logan's social and cognitive contributions are somewhere here and there within the final project. When you are one of three or four contributors, all praise is shared as well. Important aspects to keep in mind when developing Stories about working on a small group assignment.

Before moving on to Social Stories about small group work, I want to mention a helpful downloadable article that describes the use of an instructional strategy, Jigsawing, to support children with autism involved in small group projects (Rose & Howley, 2003). Jigsawing structures roles within a small group project so that each student's contribution is essential to the completion of the project. When teachers provide structure during the early stages of a project, it increases the likelihood of team members working interdependently as work progresses. As I read the article, I was reminded, too, that group projects are not 100% social immersion. There are quiet periods of independent work, an idea that I included in one of the Social Articles in this project.

The Stories in this Project

Working on a small group project requires a wide range of concepts and skills. Some of them come to mind immediately, like understanding that other members have valuable ideas and the ability to compromise. Emotion regulation strategies are equally critical, as well as the ability to "yield the floor," listen, and abandon personal preferences when outvoted. It's a big playing field, like writing on a raft and continually drifting into related tributaries. To complete this project, I had to work very hard to stay focused on Story - Article models about small group classroom-based assignments. Even with that effort, I recognize that I have only scratched the surface with the Social Stories and Social Articles included with this project (Appendix A).

The Stories-Articles are arranged according to level of difficulty for ages around seven to thirteen. “Two Ways to Do Classwork” introduces independent and cooperative assignments, and explains that both are used to help children learn. It’s followed by “Learning Independently and Cooperatively,” the same content presented at a slightly advanced academic level. Feeling that it is important to affirm and respond to Logan’s (and others like him!) detailed explanations of why he doesn’t like group work, I wrote, “I Would Rather Work Alone (Most of the Time).” (The YoYo assembly in the Story is from my work with another student; Logan’s dad will need to replace it with one of his son’s similar experiences.). “Using Others’ Ideas in a Group Project” is the longest and most advanced of the set. It may be easily edited for younger students by simplifying some of the vocabulary and phrasing and using only key sentences and phrases to shorten the length.

I wish every Carol’s Club member the very best as they encounter and complete each group project!

References

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