

Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members - October 29, 2019



Social Stories & Concepts: A Quick At-Home Course

Ross and Angela are parents of Trent, three years old and recently diagnosed with autism. They sent me a few Social Stories for feedback. That led to a phone conversation about teaching concepts with Social Stories. I was directing them to projects in the Clubhouse that would be helpful when it occurred to me that I could send them corresponding workshop videos as well! Among the cozy benefits of technology is that we can attend workshops in our pajamas! This project is an opportunity to stay right where you are watch segments of a Social Story workshop. The result is a mini-workshop describing how to teach concepts with Social Stories.

Participants at my presentations frequently say that, while they own the Social Story book or have read a few of my articles, that “nothing makes it make sense...” like hearing the information live. The video segments in this project are from a two-day Social Story workshop sponsored by Autism Community Training, Vancouver, British Columbia, held in Surrey, British Columbia, on August 15th and 16th of this year. My sincere appreciation to Deborah Pugh for making this first video project possible.

Concepts organize experience. I recently had the opportunity to have dinner with Dr. Temple Grandin, professor of animal science at Colorado State University and well known for her unparalleled contributions to both the livestock industry and our understanding of autism. She asked me what I see in my mind when I think of the word “factory.” It’s pretty simple – a big grayish large building with machines inside. In contrast, Temple sees several factories in her memory that she has encountered, and looks for the similarities among them. It’s identical to how we’ve approached teaching concepts with Social Stories by providing several examples and systematically organizing text and illustration to point out what they have in common. What follows are two brief written descriptions and corresponding video clips that describe how we can teach concepts to people with autism using a strategy that is consistent with this learning style.

The McDonald's Clip (Click here for a PPT-PDF version of the Social Story, ["Places to Sit and Eat at McDonald's"](#))

In the Carol's Club project, ["Behind Every Great Social Story is a Concept."](#) I describe how a series of Social Stories work together to teach a child with autism that people can't always sit where they want at a restaurant:

A few years ago, my ophthalmologist asked me if I would write a Social Story for two of his patients, grandparents of Ethan, a six-year-old boy with autism. Eating out with Ethan was challenging. At McDonald's, Ethan would quickly select and insist on sitting at a specific table, even if someone was already sitting there. He had been known to – on his own with one swipe of his arm - clear a table of food as people occupying the table watched in confusion. On my way home, I stopped at several McDonald's restaurants to take photos.

As I mentioned to my ophthalmologist (and have a responsibility to emphasize here), the current Social Stories 10.2 criteria require that I gather more information than I did for this Story. Collecting information from a blank slate regarding a situation without bias or assumption is critical to the quality and integrity of every Social Story. It helps us to discover the "best" topic, the concepts or understandings that may be missing or misunderstood. Sometimes, the best Story is no Story, when an alternate solution becomes apparent, and writing a Story is a needless trip on an unnecessary route. Minimally I should have interviewed Ethan if possible, his parents and grandparents, as well as observing a few times. Consulting with a child's caregivers is required by the second criterion of the most recent Social Stories 10.2 criteria. I was aware that I was on shaky Social Story ground as I wrote the McDonald's Story. Odds of success diminish with skipped criteria. Skip just one criterion, and by definition it's not a Social Story.

As I took the photos at McDonald's that day, I tried to imagine the situation from Ethan's point of view. For years, I've encouraged authors of Social Stories to "Abandon All Assumptions." I have to admit that there may be one helpful assumption. It was a part of my mom's philosophy. I can still hear her saying, "Everyone is doing the best they can... it's just that sometimes their best is disappointing or confusing." Assuming that Ethan is doing his best, what accounts for the difference in our responses? Is it information? What prevents me from choosing a table like Ethan does?

I've always been fascinated by universal truths. This may be one of them: People can't always sit where they want in a restaurant. The fifth criterion prevents me from writing, "Ethan, you can't sit where you want at a restaurant every time." Instead, the story encourages Ethan to discover the concept for himself. What follows is the text for "Places to Sit and Eat at McDonald's":

Sometimes my family eats at McDonald's. We usually sit and eat at a table.

We may eat at a table that looks like this.

We may eat at a table that looks like this.

Or we may eat at another kind of table.

Sometimes my family eats at McDonald's. We usually sit and eat at a table.

This Story is illustrated with photos of tables that are clear of food and free of seated people. The text doesn't mention clear tables, only that they "look like this." In this way, the Story encourages Ethan to look at tables without directing him to do so, with respect for Ethan's ability to receive and apply the information. There is also the unstated suggestion that these tables have something in common. In the first two examples, the text is placed on the table, fading to a more traditional placement of the words in the third

example. Each table is different to support generalization, and to demonstrate that tables don't have to look exactly like any of these, they need to be clear - as all of these are - to be considered available.

A couple of weeks after receiving the story, Ethan's grandparents called to thank me. Ethan reviewed the Story a few times before the next visit to McDonald's. After getting their food at the counter, Ethan led their search for a place to sit and eat. He happily tapped vacant tables as they passed, each time repeating the phrase from his Story, "...we may eat at a table that looks like this!" Subsequent visits were much the same. After one fifty-seven-word Story with hard-working illustrations, Ethan had discovered a new response to table selection.

I was thrilled to hear that Ethan had learned how to select tables at McDonald's. There was more work to do, however. Using similar text and corresponding photos, I suggested that his grandparents write stories for a variety of other restaurants, like Burger King, Olive Garden, and locally owned establishments. They did. Their final Story, "Places to Sit and Eat at Restaurants," used several photos from each of the previous stories on each page. The McDonald's story was the first in a series to demonstrate a concept across contexts: You can't always sit where you want at a restaurant (April 9, 2018).

The Airplane Toilets Clip (Click here for a PPT-PDF of the Story, "[Learning About Toilets in Airplanes](#)")

Just as the restaurant Stories for Ethan used a series of similar Stories about individual restaurants to teach a social concept applicable to all of them, the Story, "Learning About Toilets in Airplanes," published as part of a collection of Stories in the Carol's Club project, "[Social Stories About Air Travel](#)" employs a similar strategy within one Story:

Each word represents a concept, and concepts can elude a child with autism. This Story builds an understanding of "toilet" and depicts several toilets in a variety of contexts. Their common purpose - people use toilets to safely pee and poop - is where their similarity lies despite the many variations in physical details. To lessen anxiety, a fictional character, Emma, is used to allow the Story audience to watch and learn from her (March 12, 2018).

In that same project, there's another Story, "[Waiting to Fly](#)," that teaches "waiting" as it applies to air travel. You'll notice the similarities to the restaurant and airplane toilet Stories, as it employs a predictable text to describe "waiting" in a variety of different contexts within a single flight experience. In other words, systematically using a series of examples with repetitive phrases and illustration to underscore the common threads and teach the concept.

I hope you have enjoyed this mini-workshop! I look forward to the possibility of creating similar workshops for you in the future!

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What you will see:

3. Learning About Toilets in Airplanes

Each word represents a concept, and concepts can elude a child with autism. This Story builds an understanding of 'toilet' and depicts several toilets in a variety of contexts. Their common purpose - people use toilets to safely pee and poop - is where their similarity lies despite the many variations in physical details. To lessen anxiety, a fictional character, Emma, is used to allow the Story audience to watch and learn from her.

The Story, “

