

Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members - November 12, 2019



Restricted Food Preferences and Social Stories™

Includes the Social Story: "Discovering Food and New Dinosaurs with the Scientific Method"

I have a request from Carol's Club member, Carriekings, for a Social Story about trying new foods for Brody, an intelligent eleven-year-old boy with autism. Brody loves science, the solar system, trains, and magic tricks. He does not like to try new foods, but recently has shown signs of increasing flexibility. For example, this past summer, Brody tried popcorn for the first time. He loved it! Carriekings is continuing to teach Brody that "trying new foods can lead to new preferred foods." She has developed Social Stories in the past and writes best from an existing model. Carriekings is seeking help to create new Stories for Brody on this topic.



I wish I had a piece of crispy bacon for every time that I have encountered a child with restricted food preferences! It is a common childhood issue, not restricted to - but occurring more frequently - among children with autism. We need many Stories on this topic for children with – or without – autism! This project includes a Story for Brody and thousands of other children whose default response to “just one bite...” is “No,” a never-in-a-million years sort of refusal.

The first step to developing any Social Story is to gather information to discover (or identify) a specific topic and ensure Story accuracy and credibility. I found a lot of information online and a summary that beautifully echoed much of what I had learned, in [“Five Tips for Introducing New Foods to Your Child with Autism”](#) (Applied Behavioral Analysis Programs). Their list echoes the advice of many other websites:

1. Offer choices
2. Play with food
3. Pay attention to textures
4. Take baby steps
5. Stay calm

The above advice is surprisingly consistent from one resource to the next. Providing several food choices can minimize stress. Playing with food (a recommendation that surprised me) pairs it with fun, and offers an opportunity to explore its texture, smell, and other characteristics, or compare it to foods that are already a part of a child’s preferred repertoire. Many children with autism respond to the texture of an unfamiliar food more than taste. Keeping this in mind, altering the texture of a food with chopping or a blender, or combining it with something else, may make it more palatable. Slow but sure wins the race and believing that ensures a calm and comfortable context around the dinner table. I encourage you to explore the research and information relevant to your child, student, or client before developing your Story about food preferences.

Decisions while Developing, [“Discovering Food and New Dinosaurs with the Scientific Method”](#)

As is usually the case, writing this Story presented some interesting author choices. As described earlier, my audience is an intelligent pre-adolescent boy who is interested in science, the solar system, trains, and magic tricks. I had several other questions for Carriekings. She reports that sensory issues do not seem to be the cause of Brody’s frequent food refusals. I also learned that Brody loves experiments.

It’s cumbersome to write a Social Story without knowing the exact nature, or cause, of the current issue. I considered writing an article about how taste buds change as children grow, explaining the reasons why parents encourage children to try new foods. I began writing a Story titled, “The Food List,” describing how each person has a list of preferred and avoided foods. The list of preferred foods gets longer over time, and the avoided list becomes shorter. Either of these may have fit the bill. I finally decided on Story content that would “cover the most ground” in hopes of helping Brody see the bigger food picture as he reaches adolescence and adulthood.

I used a fictional character, Connor, for several reasons. Anticipating that a Story about trying new foods might elicit anxiety, I elected to avoid mentioning Brody (or too many of his personalized details). Instead, Brody has an opportunity to observe and consider the experience of Connor, someone similar but not identical to him. I used science and experiments to hold Brody's interest, with the scientific method providing me with an engaging, systematic, logical, and unemotional format. But in place of Brody's specific interests, Connor, the fictional character, likes dinosaurs and wants to be a paleontologist.

From a kid's perspective, it would be nice if the rationale for trying new foods included more than one's future health or compliance with a parental request. The Story identifies another reason. Brody is eleven. The next decade holds critical transitions to new opportunities, possibly away from home. As Brody becomes more comfortable with food and flexible about its preparation (i.e., all meatloaf doesn't need to taste the same), it will be easier for him to pursue vocational training, attend a university, or pursue other interests.

There's a reason the term "picky eater" or anything similar does not appear in Brody's Story. The word and phrases that we use can backfire as self-fulfilling prophecies. A child who hears "picky eater" may perceive it as a "given" characteristic outside of his control or an expectation to fulfill. I proofed the Story for unnecessary references to food preferences or refusals; there were several sentences where the remaining text conveyed the same meaning despite the deletion.

On a closing note, I received a question via email moments before posting this project. Carol's Club member, CharlesB., asked how long it takes me to develop a Carol's Club Story. Writing Social Stories for Carol's Club takes anywhere from eight to fifteen hours. That's longer than the Stories that I wrote for students on my consultant caseload at Jenison Public Schools. The investment of time doesn't bother me; in fact, the time flies. I always discover or learn something new. It keeps me humble and intrigued by the process and product that is every Social Story.

References

Applied Behavioral Analysis Programs (n.d.). Five tips for introducing new foods to your child with autism. Retrieved from <https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisprograms.com/lists/five-tips-for-introducing-new-foods-to-your-child-with-autism/>