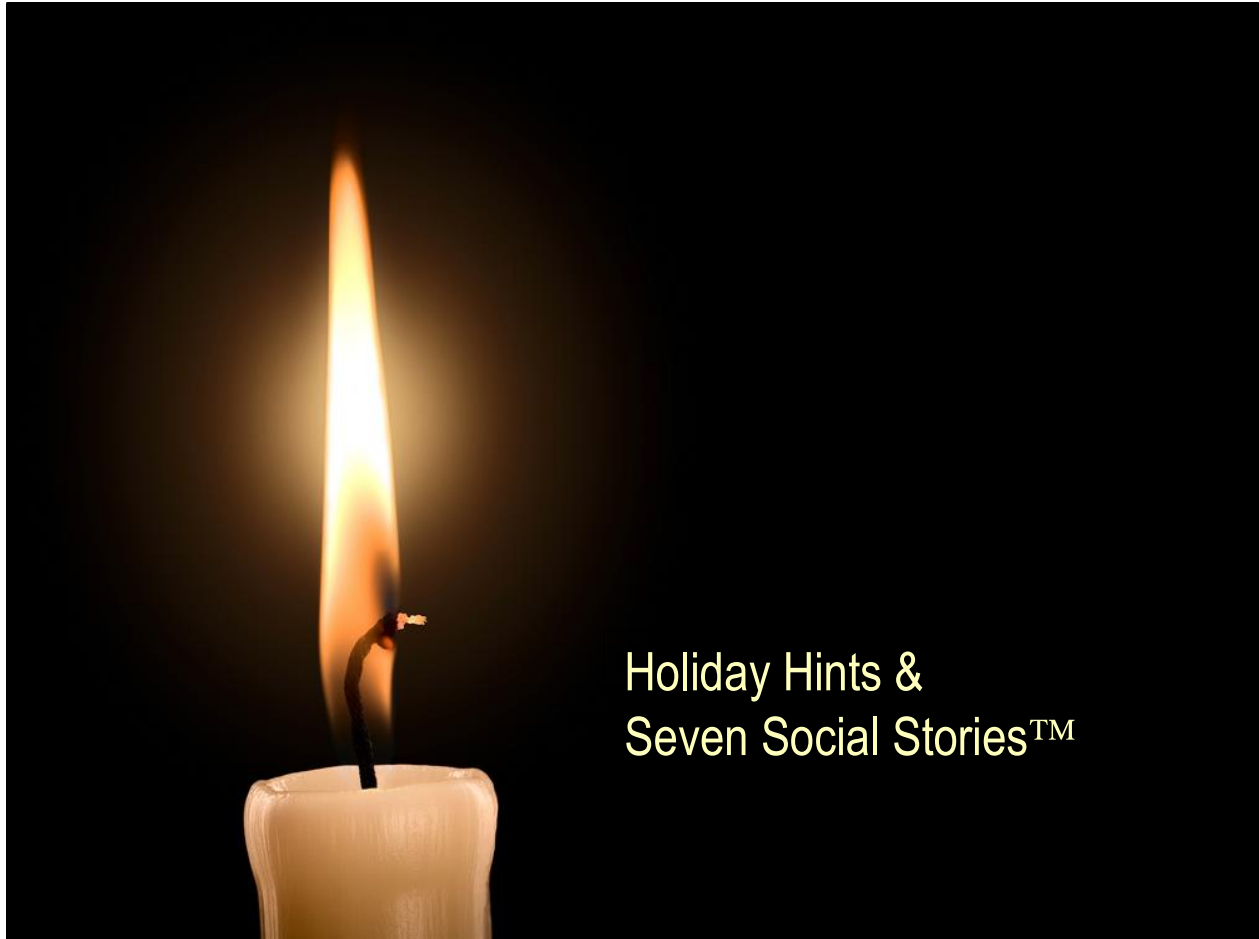


Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members - December 10, 2019



We've set a record! On average, I receive a Carol's Club project request one to two times a week. On December 1, I received twenty-three requests for Social Stories. The topics ranged from describing how to build a snowman, to explaining why there's a tree in the living room, to the social concepts and expectations that surround gift giving.

I read and responded to each email. (If I missed you, on December 1 or anytime, please let me know.) Nothing changes a home faster or more comprehensively than the holidays! There is no place for a child diagnosed with autism to go to get a break! People move faster. The daily schedule is changed and challenged as it stretches to include parties and evening student plays and concerts. The house smells different. Relatives and friends stop by, sometimes unexpectedly. The list goes on. This project includes several Stories with links to relevant, previously posted projects. I have tried to address collective concerns while supporting your individual efforts and ingenuity with as many ideas as possible.

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The Social Stories

There are seven Social Stories organized into two groups: 1) Coloring Stories and 2) Receiving Gifts. My original, unrealistic plan was to include *Stories with descriptions of the traditions of Christmas, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa. The seven Stories that I did complete reminded me of the time that each consumes! Instead, I turned my focus to demonstrating a range of Social Story strategies. My hope is that one or more of the Stories will serve as a model to develop a personalized Story for your child, student, or client.

First and foremost, think before you write. In anticipation of holiday events, we may be led to believe that we have a lot of Social Stories to write! This is a mistake. The previously posted Carol's Club project, "[Writing for the Holidays.](#)" will save you precious time:

Abandon the writing assumption in favor of gathering information. This is a more detailed version of thinking ahead. Fears aside, consider the basic activities that lay ahead. You and I see the sequence and adapt to changing contexts and the unexpected as we navigate each gathering. Many children may not be as well equipped to predict what's next or respond effectively to surprises in routine, or even that which lies on the other side of the gift wrapping around a present. What do we know about this child, and these events, that will make them comfortably compatible? (posted in the Clubhouse on December 4, 2017).

Include a [Praise Story](#) or two in your list of holiday Social Stories. Look through the photos from last year. We typically don't take pictures of children who are overwhelmed or upset! This makes photos perfect illustrations for Stories that praise a child's positive contributions to family events. From my experience, Stories that describe a photo inspire corresponding text; they almost write themselves. It's also a reminder to take photos this year to use in the future:

The 4th Criterion, referred to as FOURmat, includes discussion of how to illustrate a Social Story. Illustrations may include charts, graphs, drawings, or anything that will enhance (while not distracting from) the intended meaning of the text. For this reason, Authors typically research and write a Story or Article first, selecting illustrations afterward. With Praise Stories, that process frequently reverses, with the illustration initiating the Story and the text written to go along with it. An adolescent returns home from high school with a completed painting, a photo is taken, details gathered, with text developed to describe the achievement. If I was a parent of a child with autism, I would try to raise my camera consciousness. Personally, I am horrible at keeping my phone within reach, and my mind tuned into the fact that if I see something happen, I can get a picture of it. If I was more conscious of my ability to capture anything on film, as a parent of a child with autism, I'd be able to quickly just snap! to catch images - of a gesture, my child straightening his room, or a new friend at the community playground - to use in a Praise Story. ("The Positive Power of a Praise Story," posted in the Clubhouse on January 29, 2019).

*As part of my research for Stories about Hanukkah and Kwanzaa traditions, I ordered four children's books from Amazon. They aren't Social Stories, but all are very good. They are, "My First Kwanzaa," by Karen Katz, "Together for Kwanza," by Juwanda G. Ford, "Celebrate Hanukkah (with Light, Latkes, and Dreidels)" by Deborah Heiligman, and "The Story of Hanukkah," by David A. Adler.

Coloring Stories

Social Stories and coloring share an interesting connection. There is research to support that they both reduce anxiety. Pairing the two is a “no brainer,” especially considering the stress that children with autism (and their parents, teachers, and clinicians!) may experience during the holidays. From [Part I](#) of “Introducing Coloring Social Stories: Discovering Uncharted Topics and Possibilities,” posted in the Clubhouse on February 12, 2019 (for [Part II of the same article click here](#)):

To stay healthy, eat well, exercise, get plenty of rest, and color. Coloring is beneficial to children and adults alike. One theory is that the repetitive, predictable motion of coloring quiets the amygdala, settles nerves, and works to restore calm and contentment. Getting negative emotions out of the way makes it easier to focus our attention, solve problems, and think creatively. When we color, “...our minds are engaged yet free to roam... unexpected associations and ideas pop up, unleashing inner creative genius” (Chen. No date). Coloring is “...great for your mental, emotional, and intellectual health” (Martinez, 2015).

There are three holiday Coloring Stories in this project, each available in PDF or WORD format. The WORD version makes it possible for you to revise, and will go directly to your download file:

1. It’s Okay to Visit Santa in My Own Way [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

This Story was inspired by members asking for help with visiting Santa, and researched by watching children sit on Santa’s lap at Woodland Mall in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on December 5, 2019. Sometimes the visit goes well. Other times it doesn’t. I have to admit that occasionally I wanted to step in and offer a few suggestions. Instead, I wrote this Story for you.

2. My Family is Getting a Christmas Tree [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

This Story is dedicated to Jonah, who prefers furniture to stay where it is instead of making room for a tree. It contains references to the sensory aspects of a tree, as well as information about why it is there and what to expect.

3. How to Build a Snowman [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

I have a spot in my heart for Andrea. Snow came early to the east coast of the United States this year. When Andrea’s brother and sister began making a snowman, Andrea backed away, watched, and then turned to her mother and said, “Where’s my story about this?” Here it is, Andrea. There’s also a YouTube video on the topic [here](#).

Receiving Gifts

As I mentioned, I received twenty-three Carol’s Club requests on the first day of this month. Eight of them, or 34.78% with concerns about receiving gifts. If you followed the link earlier to the Carol’s Club project, “Writing for the



Holidays” (December 4, 2017), you may have encountered this excerpt describing the issues that surround gift wrap:

Gifts wrap surprises. I have worked with several students who felt that it would be better if all gifts were unwrapped. If you have something for me, why hide it? Gift wrap only adds anxiety to what is already unknown, creating an open-ended situation. That, and gifts are opened among the scrutiny of aunts, uncles, and grandparents who watching for a reaction that they are hoping to see, or listening for words that they anticipate hearing. No social pressure here? There’s more, of course – a lot more. Where do we start with gifts?

We might start with Dr. Siobhan Timmins’ book, “Successful Social Stories for Young Children: Growing Up with Social Stories (2016). Siobhan’s Stories about gifts and her accompanying discussion opened my eyes to the importance of teaching concepts with Social Stories. You will notice her influence in my Stories about receiving gifts.

I wrote the Stories “cold,” without referring to any previous Social Stories on the topic. I wanted to work from a clean slate; find another angle. It led to the development of Jackson, a fictional character. It’s his eighth birthday. Family members are arriving for dinner with wrapped presents. The first Story is about gift wrap and the anxiety it may cause. The Stories that follow guide rehearsal of receiving a gift, as Jackson opens a gift from his grandfather, aunt, and parents. Similar to actual presents, the opening of each of Jackson’s gifts contains an unexpected “twist.” I call

them Rehearsal Stories. Together, they describe the variations and nuances of topics that seem straight-forward at first (like opening a gift), but are prone to unforeseen factors that are impossible to predict.

Designed to be presented by and discussed with a caregiver, these Rehearsal Stories may be easily tailored to gift exchanges associated with a variety of celebrations and situations. Plan to introduce the Stories a few days in advance of when they will be needed, perhaps reviewing one Story a day leading up to a scheduled gift exchange. Read each Story a couple of times yourself, before sharing it with the child in your care. Think of discussion questions to use before, during, and after it is reviewed. Have fun!

1. Why Do People Wrap Gifts? [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

This is the first Story in this Social Story Set. Grandpa arrives for Jackson's birthday dinner with a wrapped gift. Jackson loves trucks and is hoping to receive more of them tonight! The Story includes a brief history and rationale to explain why people wrap gifts, and acknowledges the feelings that may occur when a child has to wait to open them. It's a bit of a cliff hanger, as Grandpa's gift remains wrapped at the conclusion of the Story. Jackson will open it in the next Story.

2. What's in the Gift from Jackson's Grandpa? [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

You'll notice the similar text from one Story to the next in this set. Repetitive text builds predictability and familiarity into a Story or Social Story Set. It's funny – even receiving a gift that you are hoping for holds an element of surprise.

3. What's in the Gift from Jackson's Aunt? [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

We've all been there. Opening some gifts is just plain stressful start to finish. Have you ever started to open a gift, and suddenly you are asked to stop? Maybe someone declares that you are out of order, that it's someone else's turn to open a present. Or, the new puppy just had an accident. It's awkward at best. Jackson will tell you that he had to stop opening his gift from Aunt Rhoda because she needed to run to get her phone to take a picture. A picture of Jackson, which may also be stressful. What is in the gift from Aunt Rhoda? Not a truck, that's what's in it. Past the striped gift wrap and blue ribbon is a lost dream and opportunity in the form of a grayish tweed sweater.

4. What's in the Gift from Mom and Dad? [PDF](#) [WORD](#)

The final Story in this set describes the gift from Jackson's parents. Considered at face value, this last present is the second not-a-truck gift of the evening. Similar to a gift card, Jackson's mom and dad have enclosed a note promising a trip to the store for Jackson to pick out a truck. It requires Jackson to quickly 1) make a meaningful connection between the note and the activity that it represents, 2) understand that leaving his party guests now to go to the store is not an option, and 3) effectively employ patience and delay gratification, to sincerely thank his parents for the gift. This Story sets the stage for parents to discuss gift cards, how they work, and the concepts that help to offset any disappointment or confusion. After all, as Holiday Inn said in a slogan years ago, "The best surprise is no surprise."

Conclusion

I learned a lot from this challenging Carol's Club project! I especially enjoyed gathering information for the Stories, especially my observation of children (and their caregivers!) visiting Santa, as well as reviewing the YouTube video about how to build a snowman and reading children's books describing Hanukkah and Kwanzaa. All in all, a great way to end the year. At least, almost. The final project of 2019 will arrive on December 24. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

References

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