

# Carol's Club CAROL GRAY SOCIAL STORIES

Custom Social Stories™ Resources Created by Carol Gray for Members - February 3, 2020



## Understanding Valentine's Day:

### Ideas, Social Stories, and a Sincere Classmate Valentine

Valentine's Day is ten days away. It is a holiday celebrated in many countries around the world. People express their love, friendship, or admiration for one another with cards, candy, and gifts. Many children love Valentine's Day! In February, it fills a classroom with pink, red, and purple hearts and other decorations. On February 14, there's a party with a flurried exchange of small Valentine cards attached to varied treats (like Oreo® cookies, chocolate bars, or suckers) or favors (stickers, tattoos, puzzles). The mix of sight, sound, altered schedules, and the heightened emotional and social tempo of the day may be overwhelming to a child with autism. Five Carol's Club members initiated this project with requests for Valentine Day strategies, resources, and sample coordinating Social Stories.

## Ideas to Prepare for Valentine's Day

There are several online articles about making Valentine's Day less stressful for people diagnosed with autism. I don't want to repeat what is already there, but if you are working with a young child, I encourage you to check out, ["Valentine's Day Ideas for Kids: Teaching the Meaning of Love"](#) (Bright Horizons Education Team, no date). It lays the groundwork for additional ways to help kids understand and feel comfortable on Valentine's Day. There's a lot to cover here! With "WH" questions and a child's age and ability in mind, describe this day and the changes that it brings to the child in your care. I've listed ideas below, some with corresponding sample Social Stories (listed and described in the following section.)

Describe...

1. Who? Valentine's Day isn't just a classroom party. Expand the concept by talking about family members and important people who would appreciate receiving a Valentine's Day greeting from your child.
2. What is Valentine's Day? What to expect? What will happen at school? Sights? Sounds? What does it mean when a dinosaur card reads, "You make me roar?" Is a response expected? What will there be to eat, and may I eat it? (With diet restrictions, send an alternate snack. For gluten-free recipes, see Amanda, no date, in the reference list.) Corresponding Social Stories: "What is Valentine's Day?" and "Many People Have Their Own Diet." (two versions).
3. When and where is Valentine's Day? It helps to know all that "Valentine's Day" entails. Festivities may occur on, before, or after Valentine's Day. They may include a visit from Grandma or a special dinner. Is there a party with friends on Saturday before or after? When will each event end, and when is the last event?
4. Other ideas to address the question of "when:"
  - a. a paper chain to count down the days until February 14<sup>th</sup> gives a child a sense of control. If there are activities planned before and after Valentine's Day, extend the chain marking those events and Valentine's Day with decorated links.
  - b. For Valentine's Day, explain two schedules in advance: one for the classroom party, the other for the entire school day. When will the school party start and end?
5. Think back to act ahead. As part of an effort to "teach Valentine's Day" and the concepts that it represents, retrieve past Valentine cards or trinkets, using tangible items to discuss what's next.
6. Suggest Valentine's cards in line with your child's interests, or suggest making (sincere) Valentine's cards for classmates. There's a sample of one included with this project.



## Project Samples: Social Stories and a Sincere Valentine

Most Carol's Club Social Stories are samples. They are intended as a starting point for parents and professionals to tailor to the age, ability, personality, and interests of the Story audience.

Occasionally, there may be a Story that can be used "right out of the box." One example: "[A Social Story for the Rest of Us](#)" posted on October 1<sup>st</sup> of last year.



The Stories in this project include:

1. "[What Is Valentine's Day?](#)" I had fun researching this Story! Valentine's Day is centuries old, with varying accounts regarding St. Valentine and the events leading to our current celebration each year. The Story is a brief overview of what Valentine's Day is, when it occurs, and the preparations and activities that we associate with it.
2. "[Many People Have Their Own Diet: I Do, Too!](#)" There are many children on restricted diets, a factor that can make Valentine Treats downright disappointing! This Story describes a few people known to the audience who are on "their own" diets, ending with acknowledgment of his own. This is definitely a Story that will benefit from personalized text and photos. There are two versions: an illustrated [one-page PDF](#) document and a slightly [longer PPT-PDF version](#) with more extensive illustration.
3. "[Understanding Classmates at a Valentine's Day Party](#)" This Story is a rewrite of "[Understanding Classmates at a Halloween Party](#)" posted in Carol's Club on September 24, 2018. Rewrites are a Social Story strategy that builds concepts – in this case, kids at parties!



I was contacted by a Carol's Club member whose son, Cody, refused to distribute the commercial Valentine's Day cards last year. Cody insisted that "they weren't true." (Thankfully, the Valentines that he received from his classmates didn't bother him! According to Cody those were, "Just a little stupid.") Cody's mom asked for an idea for his cards this year.

I do remember receiving classmate Valentine cards as a kid and thinking they were a little silly. At that time, pledges of everlasting love were not uncommon. Today's cards shy away from that sort of commitment, for the most part. However, a review of the Valentine's aisle at my local drug store indicates that it is possible to send a card celebrating friendship to a classmate where none exists or is even desired. And, there are cards with messages that, considered at face value, are downright confusing: Do we really want *anyone* to have a ferocious Valentine's Day?



It's because of Cody's sentiments about Valentine's cards and their distribution that I included this segment into the Story, "What is Valentine's Day" Story: "It is a day for people to let others know that they love them, admire them, or like having them as friends. *At school, children often give a Valentine card or treat to each of their classmates because they work and learn together*" (italics added).

Cody's mom and I developed a card that can be fastened to a sticker with a paper clip. It reads "Happy Valentine's Day from Cody to \_\_\_\_\_." It features his photo and room for Cody to write a message or draw a picture on the front or back of the card. The plan is to print it out on heavier paper for durability.

Cody is excited about typing each of his classmate's names instead of writing them by hand. He's also looking forward to picking out stickers for his cards and writing a message to each classmate. We considered envelopes (small colorful ones are available from Amazon) but decided to go with paperclipping a sticker to each card. Cody's mom plans to review the cards before they head off to school to make sure Cody's greetings and drawings are okay for distribution.

Have a Happy Valentine's Day! Thank you for being a member of Carol's Club.

## References

Bright Horizons Education Team (no date). Valentine's Day ideas for kids: Teaching the meaning of love. Bright Horizons. Retrieved online: <https://www.brighthouse.com/family-resources/true-love-on-valentines-day>

Canamella, K. (January 31, 2017). Helping your child with autism understand Valentine's Day. American Autism Association. Retrieved online: <https://www.myautism.org/helping-child-autism-understand-valentines-day/>

Canamella, K. (January 31, 2017). 5 autism-friendly Valentine's Day crafts. American Autism Association. Retrieved online: <https://www.myautism.org/5-autism-friendly-valentines-day-crafts/>

Woodburn Pediatric Clinic (February 14, 2016). Facts about Valentine's Day when your child has autism. Woodburn Pediatric Clinic. Retrieved online: <https://www.woodburnpediatric.com/blog/facts-about-valentines-day-when-your-child-has-autism/>

Amanda (no date). The perfect gluten-free Valentine's Day party. Eat at Our Table. Retrieved from: <https://eatatourtable.com/perfect-gluten-free-valentines-day-party/>