



Carol's Club

Custom Social Stories™ Resources
Created by Carol Gray for Members

CAROL GRAY
SOCIAL STORIES

It's Summer! This Is Okay.
Ideas and a Social Story™ to Structure Summer

The Request

Hi Carol-

I am really enjoying Carol's Club and using so many of the projects with my son, Rydell. He's eight years old and does well academically and struggles with physical activities, team sports, and the social-emotional skills. Rydell loves school and has been blessed with a series of talented and sensitive teachers. The issue is that, in his words, "I don't want it to be summer!" We went through this last year and the year before. There is no schedule to speak of, and that's a big part of the problem I think. It's more relaxed. I am not kidding when I say his protests start with the Memorial Day Parade. (Rydell loves the parade but hates that summer is next. With his mouth full of candy collected at this year's parade, he turned to me and said, "I hate summer, Mom."). His protests continue until the first school bell in the fall. He's lost in summer. There's not much that interests him in it, and we've rules about time spent with electronics. I know most of your experience is with children with autism in a school setting, but do you have any ideas to make summer easier?

Thanking you with a hug in advance, Kim

P.S. It's not just summer - it's any day off, break, or vacation. Summer is the longest no-school stretch. Anything that might work with that will likely work with the rest.

The Project

Based on my experience as a teacher and a consultant to students with autism in the schools, I am confident that Kim is not the only parent with a child who would love to attend school each day, every day. As Kim mentions, her son excels at academic tasks. We all gravitate to activities where we feel competent, and ultimately avoid those that present continual challenges for us. This project focuses on structuring the "crazy, lazy days of summer" with simple systematic strategies. *It's Summer! This Is Okay*, a separate PPT-PDF document included with this project, is a summary of the same ideas for kids.

1. Some Kids Love School; Others Don't.

It's okay to love school and also okay that some kids don't feel the same way. I remember overhearing a mom say to her child, "it's weird to say that you like school because most kids don't." I appreciate Mom's concern that it may be "socially expensive" to announce, "I hate summer" or respond to a classmate who says she's excited about vacation with, "That's wrong." It reminds me of Christopher, eight years old, who ran into his classroom after each recess to write the names of classmates on the whiteboard who had broken rules on the playground. It's risky.



In place of telling a child that their statements are "weird," an alternate strategy is to listen and affirm the frustration and fears of free time, applaud academic talents, and write a Story to help a child understand that some kids don't love school, and that's okay. Additional Stories can help to make summer more fun.

3. A Calendar Structures Time - A Journal Captures It

When I was teaching, calendars were my powerful go-to tool. Understanding that each day is represented by a square on a calendar is the same as learning to tell time - there's a sense of control predicting events and measuring time. Calendars are available online (just Google "online calendars for children"). For kids, I like the tactile benefits of a personal calendar and glue, a set of fine line markers, and highlighters.



A summer journal is a first-person record of each day's events. One case example is Angie, age nine. With the end of the school year approaching, Angie's parents asked for help. They dreaded vacation battles with Angie to try new things or visit unfamiliar places. Despite her resistance to travel, Angie loved souvenirs. She also enjoyed collections and receiving stars in school for her achievements. Angie's interests resulted in a notebook that she titled, "Angie's Star-Studded Summer." She loved writing and pasting photos and things on each page. Angie's parents reported that closing each day with journal time had "backward benefits." Each day Angie worked to ensure "great journal stuff" and expressed her hopes of earning a star. In the fall, the journal was helpful in completing an essay about her summer.



3. There is Always a Schedule.

I think it's a mistake for caregivers to believe otherwise, especially as we talk to a person with autism. The words parents and professionals use can needlessly cause or increase anxiety. There are three kinds of schedules: Posted, Not Posted, and Discovered. The key is to help children understand each type and the differences between them. All of them - including Not Posted and Discovered Schedules, are placed in writing.

A Posted Schedule is a list of activities that occur at a particular time (with modifications noted with Post-It® notes.) I believe in daily chores for kids. Tasks related to living things (feeding the dog or fish, setting the table for dinner) are good candidates for a posted schedule because they are completed at about the same time each day. Write them down, assign a specific time to each, and display it with room for kids to place a check indicating completion each day. A child can help or decorate it.



Unposted Schedules are less predictable than those that are on display. We can't predict with absolute certainty each event or assign it a specific time. The schedule is determined to a large extent by a destination - like Disneyland - or by an event or game, like Field Day at school. Caregivers often have more information about unposted schedules than kids - after all, the adults are in charge. Listing updates on Post-It® notes for a child to keep in his or her pocket can structure an unposted type of day. As the day progresses, every two or three hours a caregiver briefly lists what's next in probable order, or briefly describes an upcoming activity.



Discovered Schedules become apparent over time. They are useful when typical routines are "out the window" and the day is "wide open." Discovered schedules are a good fit for a day outdoors where there are unforeseen or unexpected elements, like the weather. The sequence of activities while camping or at a beach may be determined as-you-go.



Discovered Schedules require a Recorder, a person who keeps track of the day's direction. When an activity begins, the Recorder writes down the time and a word or two to identify the task, situation, or



endeavor. At bedtime, there's the schedule - and we discovered it! - a list of the day's events and the times that they occurred.

About the Social Story:
It's Summer! This Is Okay.

It's challenging to write a Social Story for an unknown audience. A lot of information is inaccessible - and, it's impossible to write something that will "hit home" for everyone. The Story included with this project is intended as a starting point, a model to tailor to the needs of a family member, student, or client. There may need to be fewer words or different illustrations. If you like the computer-based format, I created this Story on PowerPoint® and then saved it as a PDF.

I sent a rough draft of this project to Kim for her review. She has already purchased a calendar, a notebook to use as a journal, and is modifying the Story about summer for Rydell. I wish Kim and every Carol's Club member a summer full of new experiences, learning, and fun!

I'll be back with a new Project on July 2!

Additional note: Have you ever spent the better part of a day trying to get a computer to do something it definitely should be doing... but won't? That was my day today when I tried to upload the original illustrated version of the Story, "It's Summer! This Is Okay," into the Carol's Club post. I've completed similar tasks with other Carol's Club projects of equal and larger size many times before. But, not today. I guess I should take heart that it doesn't seem to be me at fault this time; perhaps something with the server.

Due to the timely nature of this project, I have decided to distribute the article today with the Story text. You will receive an email and link the moment the original illustrated version of the Story is available.

It's Summer! This Is Okay.

- Carol Gray

Some children love going to school. Some children do not.

Some children wish school was open all summer. Some children are happy to have a break from school. It's okay for kids to think and feel their own way about school or summer. Calendars help adults keep track of their activities. On a calendar, every day has a date. There is one box for each date.

Some kids use calendars, too. They use them to keep track of things, like how many vacation days are left. Some kids draw circles around days where something fun is planned. There are many things that kids write or draw on their calendars.

Some kids use a journal in the summer. A journal is a place to write or draw about each day.

Sometimes it's a good idea to make a journal entry when the day is almost over, just before getting ready for bed.

Every day has a schedule. School days have schedules. Summer days have schedules.

Some schedules are posted. At school, *Posted Schedules* often list subjects and the times that they usually occur. Many *Posted Schedules* in homes list chores. Sometimes, they also include when chores need to be completed. This is because some chores need to be done at about the same time each day.

Sometimes a schedule is not posted. It's an *Unposted Schedule*. At school, Field Day follows an *Unposted Schedule*. Adults may not post the events or times that things will happen. But, they usually know what will happen first, second, third, and so on. When a family goes camping, activities are not usually posted. Adults are often in charge of *Unposted Schedule* days. It's okay to ask them what will happen next.

Sometimes, often in the summer, an adult may say something like, "Well...we don't really have a schedule today." This is okay. It is also a mistake. Every day has a schedule. There are *Posted Schedules*, *Unposted Schedules*, and *Discovered Schedules*.

When no one knows what the schedule is, it is for sure that it will be discovered before the day is over. It's a *Discovered Schedule*.

A *Discovered Schedule* needs a Reporter. This is a person who writes down what happens and when. Almost always, something happens. At the end of the day, there's the *Discovered Schedule*!

It's summer! Some kids use a calendar or journal. I may try using my own calendar or journal.

Every summer day has a schedule, too. It may be posted, unposted, or it may need to be discovered!