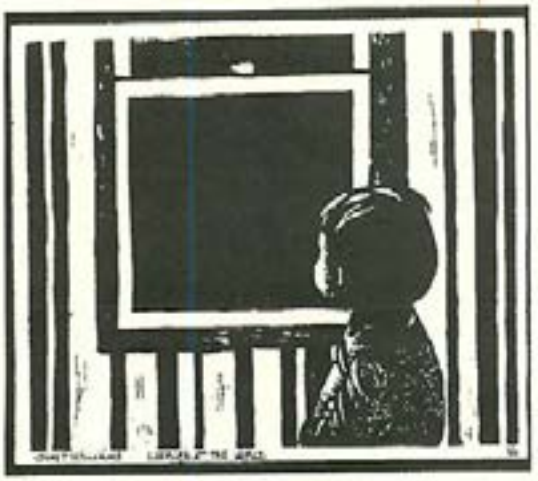
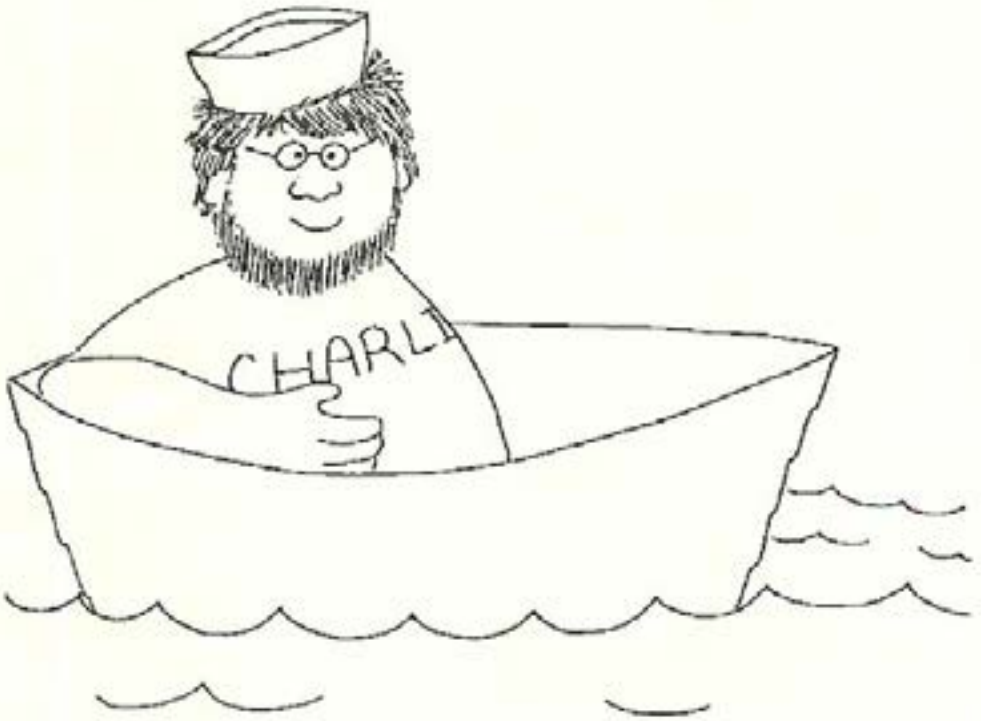


THE MORNING NEWS

Jenison Public Schools

Spring '98

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.



An edition focusing on

Social Stories, etc.

THE MORNING NEWS

A publication of Jenison Public Schools, Michigan
February 1998, Volume 10, Number 1

Dedicated to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and those who work alongside them to improve mutual understanding.

The Social Story Edition

Complete in two issues: Spring & Summer 1998

Articles and ideas related to
Social Stories and related instructional techniques.

About Our Cover:

On our cover is an illustration from the first social story titled,"Charlie Over the Water", written by Carol Gray in January of 1991. Carol wrote the story for a kindergarten student with autism to describe how to play the game of the same title. Since that time, social stories have become a popular strategy to help people with autistic spectrum disorders understand and interpret social information and abstract concepts. Originally called Social Cognition Stories, the guidelines that define Social Stories have changed only slightly over the past seven years.

Contents

Address all correspondence to: Carol Gray (THE MORNING NEWS, Jenison High School, 2140 Baker Road, Jenison, Michigan 49428 Phone 616-457-8955 or FAX 616-457-8442
Carol Gray, Editor. Sue Jonker, Design Editor. Karen Lind, Pen Pal Registry Editor Logo: Janet Williams

Social Stories 101

This edition of THE MORNING NEWS (spring and summer 1998) focuses on ideas related to social stories. This short article provides prerequisite information, including the definition of a social story, and a brief description of each of the related instructional techniques.

What Is a Social Story?

A Social Story is a story defined by a specific format and guidelines that objectively describes a person, skill, event, concept, or social situation. Social Stories require consideration of the perspective of the person with an autistic spectrum disorder (A.S.D.). Most Social Stories are written by parents or professionals. The goal of a Social Story is to share relevant information, including *where* and *when* a situation takes place, *who* is involved, *what* is occurring, and *why*.

Types of Social Story Sentences and Ratio

Social Stories are comprised of a combination of up to three types of sentences: *descriptive*, *perspective*, and *directive* sentences. Descriptive sentences objectively define where a situation occurs, who is involved, what they are doing, and why. Perspective sentences are statements that describe the thoughts and feelings of other people. Directive sentences are statements that directly define what is expected as a response to a given cue or situation. These sentences gently direct a student's behavior, often beginning with, "I will try..." or "I will work on...".

The Basic Social Story Ratio defines the proportion of descriptive, perspective, and directive sentences in a social story. This ratio is maintained regardless of the length of a social story, and ensures their descriptive quality:

0 - 1 directive sentence
. . . . . = **Social Story Ratio**
2 - 5 descriptive and/or perspective sentences

The following sample Social Story identifies each type of sentence, and illustrates how the Social Story Ratio applies:

On most school days we have recess (descriptive). Usually, recess is outdoors (descriptive). Sometimes, recess is indoors (descriptive). Usually our principal looks at the weather to decide if recess is going to be indoors (perspective). The principal will tell my teacher if recess has to be indoors (descriptive). If recess is indoors, I will try to stay calm (directive). On another day, recess will be outdoors (descriptive).

The Social Story Guidelines

The Social Story Guidelines are based on the learning characteristics of people with A.S.D. Every Social Story adheres to the following guidelines: 1) positively state desired behaviors. 2) write at or slightly below a student's comprehension level, keeping stories short for not yet readers; 3) provide assistance recognizing and interpreting social cues, describe *who, what, when, where, and why*; 4) "write-in reality" by mentioning variations in routine; 5) use care with illustrations, being cautious of extraneous details; 6) consider using "Wh" questions as titles or subtitles; 7) functionally or visually define ambiguous terms, 8) carefully write from a first person perspective. 9) ensure the story is accurate if interpreted literally, using terms like *sometimes* and *usually*; and 10) consider incorporating interests into how a story is written or implemented. The Social Story Guidelines ensure the accuracy of each social story, as well as their patient and reassuring quality.

Related Instructional Techniques

Social Stories are one of several interventions developed at Jenison Public Schools to teach social understanding to people with A.S.D. Other interventions include *The Sixth Sense*, a lesson plan for grades 2 - 12 that helps typical peers understand their classmate with an A.S.D.; *Comic Strip Conversations*, an approach that incorporates the use of simple drawings and color to effectively identify and discuss what people say, do, and think in a given situation; and *Pictures of Me*, a special Social Story used to introduce a person with an A.S.D. to their personality, talents, and diagnosis. Currently in development, *The Topic Box* is a series of activities that help students understand that each person has topics and opinions, and how to apply that understanding in a conversation. Social Stories and all of the related instructional techniques share a philosophy that social understanding can be taught, and that the responsibility for social success is shared.

The Links Between Social Stories, Comic Strip Conversations and the Cognitive Models of Autism

-Dr. Tony Attwood, Clinical Psychologist M.Sc., Ph.D., MAPS., AFBPsS.

Editor's note: *Dr. Tony Attwood is a Clinical Psychologist who has specialised in the area of autism for over 20 years. This experience covers the full range of expression along the autistic continuum from those who are profoundly disabled to university professors. His original postgraduate research was conducted with Dr. Uta Frith and examined the social skills of children with autism. He has subsequently conducted research on diagnosis and challenging behaviour and has published several papers, chapters, and two books in this area. He has always been a full time practicing clinician with a special interest in early diagnosis, severe challenging behaviour and Asperger's Syndrome. Dr. Attwood recently completed a practical book titled, "Asperger's Syndrome: A Guide for Parents and Professionals" (Jessica Kingley Publishers, London and Philadelphia, 1998). He has been invited to be the keynote speaker at international conferences and currently works in private practice in Brisbane. The above photo was taken in New Orleans, Louisiana, during Dr. Attwood's recent workshop tour of southern U.S. cities.*

Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations are an ingenious technique for helping people with autism. They are rapidly becoming a significant component of the school curriculum for such children, but do the theoretical models used to explain autism, also explain why they are successful? As with many innovative and practical ideas, they originated from working directly and collaboratively with children rather than from intellectual consideration and subsequent application of an academic theory of autism. However, when one examines the current theories explaining why children with autism are different, one can recognise how the strategies are consistent with these models. Research on the cognitive abilities of people with autism has produced three distinct theoretical models. Each model will be briefly explained with quotations from autobiographies to illustrate specific points and an explanation of how aspects of Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations are consistent with each model.

Theory of Mind

One of the most significant advances in our understanding of autism has occurred from the research of Uta Frith, Simon Baron-Cohen and Fransesca Happe' which supports the hypothesis that children with autism have an impairment in the fundamental ability to "mind read" (Baron-Cohen 1995). From the age of around four years, children understand that other people have thoughts, knowledge, beliefs and desires that influence and explain their behaviour. In contrast, children with autism have considerable difficulty conceptualising and appreciating the thoughts and feelings of another person. In other words, they lack the ability to think about thoughts.

This ability is essential in order to understand the behaviour of others. For example, if you saw someone opening a refrigerator door you might assume the person was hungry and looking for something to eat. If they then found an unlabelled container, tasted the contents and made the facial expression we recognise as

disgust, you would think they did not like the contents. If they then placed the container with the garbage one would assume they had a personal dislike for the contents or it was bad

Gunilla Gerland has High Functioning Autism and recently had her autobiography translated from Swedish to English (Gerland 1996). She writes:

The basic emotional states, sorrow and joy, did of course exist in me, but I didn't take them out into the world and glue them on to other people, so I couldn't recognise those complex emotions shown by others. (page 112)

Mind blindness also means the person has difficulty in distinguishing whether someone's actions are intentional or accidental. For example, the author observed a child with Asperger's Syndrome who was sitting on the classroom floor with the other children in his class and listening to the teacher read a story. The adjacent boy started to tease him by poking his fingers in his back while the teacher wasn't looking. The child became increasingly annoyed and eventually hit the boy to make him stop. The teacher was looking at the children at this point (but did not know the preceding events) and reprimanded the child for being aggressive. Other children would have proclaimed they were provoked and recognise that if the teacher knew the circumstances, the consequences would be less severe and more equitable. Yet he remained silent. The teacher continued with her story and a few moments later another child returned to the classroom from going to the toilet. As he carefully moved past the child with Asperger's Syndrome, he accidentally touched him but the child was not aware that in this situation, the action was accidental. He hit him in the same way as the child who was tormenting him.

Social Stories provide information and tuition on what both parties in a given interaction or situation may be thinking. In particular, the perspective sentences specifically describe a person's thoughts and feeling in a given situation and explain the consequences of actions on the thoughts of others. Comic Strip Conversations include thought bubbles and the use of different colours to visually illustrate a person's thoughts and feelings. It is interesting that recent research has confirmed the value of concrete representation in helping understand mental states. A study by John Swettenham and colleagues found that conceiving the mind as a camera helped children with autism develop an alternative theory of mind (Swettenham et al. 1996).

Our codes of social conduct are based on the knowledge of how our behaviour affects the thoughts, opinions and feelings of others. We strive not to offend. If a child does not conceptualise the thoughts of others then they will appear rude and inconsiderate, descriptions often made by strangers when meeting a child with autism. Such children appear to belong to a different social culture. Social Stories provide a "visitors" guide to our social culture, by explaining social conventions, their rationale and what is expected for those exploring "unfamiliar territory".

A new area of research currently being explored by Uta Frith is whether mind blindness also applies to the child's own mind. Does the child have the ability to reflect on their own experiences, thoughts and feelings? Can they relate *their* inner thoughts to those of others?

One aspect of Comic Strip Conversations is that the child can draw themselves with a thought bubble and use colour to represent their own thoughts and reflections. The author has found that children with Asperger's Syndrome are often confused how to accurately define and portray their own thoughts and feelings. They also often assume all participants are experiencing the same feelings.

Theory of Weak Central Coherence

Uta Frith and Francesca Happe' (1994) have developed another theoretical model described by the term Weak Central Coherence. This model is independent of the ability to mind read and describes a reduced ability to draw together diverse information to construct a higher level meaning. In other words, the child with autism overly focuses on detail and fails to grasp the "whole picture". The model is primarily based on three research designs. The first examines the ability to identify a hidden figure or shape within a larger drawing, e.g. a triangle embedded within a picture of a clock. Children with autism are conspicuously quick and competent at this task. Their thinking is not distracted by the overall theme. The second design examines the child's

performance on the Block Design subtest of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale. The child has to copy an abstract pattern using coloured cubes with a time limit. Children with autism are remarkably good at breaking a large geometric pattern into small segments. The third design involves reading aloud a sentence that includes a word that can be pronounced in two ways according to the context. For example, "There was a tear in her eye," might be read aloud such that the word "tear" sounds like the pronunciation used in, "There was a tear in her dress." Another example,"The dog was on a long lead" could be pronounced as the word "lead" which describes the heavy metal. Such errors are rare with ordinary children but significantly more common for those who have autism.

Thus children with autism are good at tasks that require attention to detail but poor at deciphering the overall meaning. They can immediately identify small, obscure items or notice minute changes in the position of objects in a room. Their interests are often confined to aspects of life others consider of limited relevance such as collecting clothes pegs or different types of spark plugs. This unusual perception of the world can also affect the child's drawings. The conventional strategy is to start with the general outline and then fill in the details. Autistic children often start by drawing isolated detail. In the mind of the child with autism, detail is paramount and if this is changed, the whole "picture" changes.

Having weak central coherence means having considerable difficulty identifying which details are important and how they connect to form a consistent pattern or "gestalt". For us, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts, but the child with autism, may not know which parts are relevant and how they are related. The autobiographies frequently refer to a problem understanding the meaning behind simple everyday events. This is illustrated by the following quotation of Therese Jolliffe (Jolliffe et al. 1992). She is an adult with autism who is currently conducting research in this area.

Reality to an autistic person is a confusing, interacting mass of events, people, places, sounds and sights. There seems to be no clear boundaries, order or meaning to anything. A large part of my life is spent just trying to work out the pattern behind everything. Set routines, times and rituals all help to get order into an unbearably chaotic life. (page 16)

The person with autism sees the world as consisting of unconnected fragments and is often desperate to create order out of apparent chaos. This can lead to false assumptions as to why specific events occur. For example Gunilla describes how:

I very much wanted to understand and that led me to think up something, a theory about how things worked, that always applied to whatever I saw. Every time my mother came (to collect her from school), one thing was always the same: she always came into the hall. What if that meant I had to be in the hall for her to come at all? That's what it was. That must be it, I thought. If she came in and I wasn't in the hall, if she didn't see me, would she then go home again? And perhaps it also meant that if I wanted to go home, then she would appear if I went out into the hall. I had actually never seen my mother in any other room except the hall, so I associated her appearance with the actual room, as if she just materialised in the doorway. Everything had to hang together in some logical way and now I had probably found it: as long as I was in the hall, the room to which my mother always came, then she would come. If on the other hand I was in the wrong room, in any of the rooms into which she never came, then she wouldn't come. (page 70)

How do Social Stories help? They use a written medium to identify which details to attend to and what they mean. They provide the code to decipher what is relevant to the situation and explain the "thread" or theme that links specific events. They also correct false assumptions. In other words they provide the logical connections and enable the child to "see" the big picture. The acquisition of this knowledge is recognised by the child as far more important than other aspects of the school curriculum. Gunilla describes how:

What was on offer at school was so totally uninteresting. I needed to learn skills, not about how many stomachs a cow had or what the farmers of Sweden produced. Knowledge of that kind said nothing to me and had nothing to do with my world. I needed to learn how you found your way around school, which lavatories to go to, what you did when you played and how my body worked. (page 126)

Comic Strip Conversations use a visual medium to identify the salience and pattern behind everyday events. They also use colour to portray feelings, a technique already discovered by some children with autism. This is explained by Gunilla as

Sometimes it was all so incomprehensible, I couldn't even find an end in the tangle to pull at. Then I would turn in on myself, knowing neither the question nor the answer; and I couldn't tell anyone. My state was just colour inside myself. I was the only one who had colours: I had an internal colour system which became a way of connecting information about different worlds, about the nursery world and the garden world. Everything became a colour inside me- people, words, feelings, atmospheres. Not understanding was faintly orange, a pale orange with sunlight coming through it. Tiredness, what I hadn't the energy to try to understand, came and laid a dark green on top of the orange light and put it out. (page 21)

Theory of Impaired Executive Function

This theory was developed by Sally Ozonoff and Bruce Pennington (1991) and James Russel (in press) They applied our knowledge of the function of specific structures within the brain and the profile of cognitive abilities associated with autism, in particular, problems with planning, organisation, shifting attention, working memory, impulse control, initiation and perseveration. This pattern suggests a dysfunction of a specific area of the brain, the pre frontal cortex. There is increasing neurological and psychological research evidence to support this theory These characteristics account for similar and different aspects of autism than are explained by the Theory of Mind and Weak Central Coherence. However, Social Stories are specifically designed to assist the individual in several of these areas. They provide a script of actions and dialogue that reduce the effects of problems with planning and organisation, and strategies and cues to assist with initiation and impulse control. People with autism also describe how they can remember and read text in their mind more efficiently than recalling spoken instructions. Gunilla refers to how:

I had an almost photographic memory for a certain type of text..... and could leaf through to a page in my head for any paragraph I needed. In some ways, I didn't really remember what was there but I had a kind of copy to the page in my head, which I was then able to read off. (page 149)

Comic Strip Conversations also use the person's relative strengths in executive functions. for example, Gunilla describes the following

But talk about things I couldn't visualise never stuck in my head - it would just fly away and settle somewhere else. The words possibly stuck, but only as words, interesting in their structure or flavour. They might have exciting colours or contain pleasant sounds, but if I couldn't visualise them they meant nothing. (page 24)

The author would add that one of the understandable characteristics of autism is to become very emotional when confused in circumstances that require social reasoning. The specific emotions can be anxiety, sadness and anger. These emotions inhibit rational thought, a process associated with the frontal lobes. Social Stories and Comic Strip Conversations are written or drawn when the child is calm and reasonable It is in this frame of mind that the child is more able to recognise the thoughts of others, the connections between events and to plan what to do.

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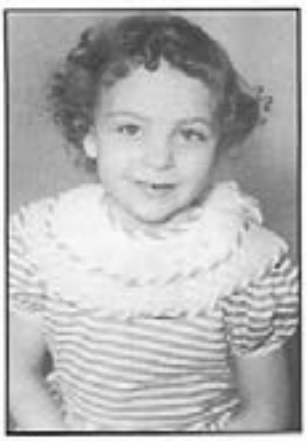
Pigeons at Recess, etc...
The Many Uses of Social Stories

- Beatrice S. Sharkey, Speech Pathologist



Editor's note: *Beatrice is a speech pathologist at Nathanael Greene School in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, who uses Social Stories and visual supports extensively with students on her caseload. As a young child (pictured above) Beatrice had a vivid imagination. Currently, she strives to help her students discover and express their own unique talents. Beatrice lives in Riverside, Rhode Island with her husband, Steve, and four children, Patrick, Susanna, Megan, and Mary. In the following article, Beatrice describes the variety of uses for Social Stories she has discovered.*

I've been servicing children diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorders for the past four years. Through my reading, I was familiar with the social story approach. I was eager to hear one of Carol Gray's presentations, and drove from Rhode Island to Maine to attend a workshop. The workshop had a tremendous impact on me.

The next day, I wrote my first social story, *Drinking Hot Chocolate*. John and I began our sessions with this drink to help him feel calm. His mother had told me that this drink helped him to relax. I also made a tape of the story, with Mozart in the background. He could listen to it at home or at school.

Social Stories have become an integral part of my work with students with autistic spectrum disorders. Last summer, John had his tonsils out. to help him, I wrote the story, *Having My Tonsils Out*. His doctor noticed that the story helped him to prepare for the operation:

Having My Tonsils Out

On Monday, I will go to Memorial Hospital to have my tonsils out. This is called an operation. It will help my sore throat to get better.

I will get up early in the morning on Monday. My stomach needs to be empty, so, I cannot eat breakfast.

I may feel a little scared. That's O.K. I will try to be brave.

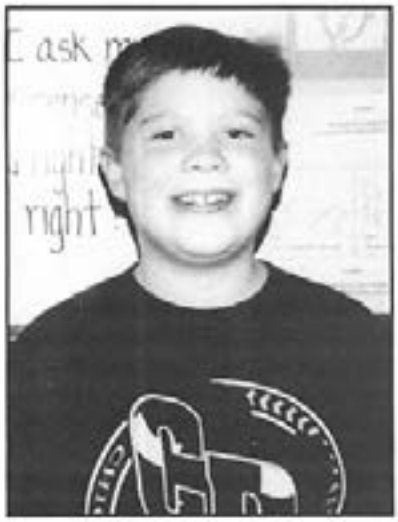
Dr. Tarro will take my tonsils out. He is very good at this. I will lay down on a hospital bed. A nice doctor will give me some medicine to help me go to sleep. Mom will be with me. She will be right next to me. Mom will help me feel calm.

After I have my tonsils out, I will come home. I will probably feel sleepy. That's O.K.

My throat might hurt a little bit. I can drink lots of shakes to help me feel better.

Mom will be home all week after I have my tonsils out. Dad and Chris will be so glad that my throat is getting better.

Frank is diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. He is in a regular second grade classroom. I service him in the classroom and in a private session. He works on his social skills with his classmates. Two of his stories are *Using Eye Contact* and *How to Ask for Help*. In a private session, Frank expressed these ideas to me in response to the social story about asking for help: *"Well, I do ask some kids. They tell me it. They mostly help me with directions. Usually, I ask the teacher, 'What do I do here?' If the teacher is busy, I read the directions or I ask a kid."* Frank gives me an example, *"There's a*



Pictured above: *Frank a second grade student at Nathanael Greene School, Pawtucket, R.I.*

really hard math thing at the bottom and I don't know what to do. Stephanie helped me and I did it."

Another delightful child that I work with is Tim. I believe Social Stories have helped Tim develop the language to understand and to express his thoughts. While dealing with his first loose tooth, his mom and I read this story to him:

My Loose Tooth

My tooth is loose. It will probably come out soon. Maybe it will come out on Sunday or Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday or Thursday or Friday or Saturday. Maybe it will come out today, maybe tonight or maybe tomorrow.

It might come out at home.

It might come out at school.

When it does come out, before I go to bed, I will put it under my pillow.

The tooth fairy will come and probably will give me some money.

It can be fun to have a loose tooth.

Tim and John are in a third grade inclusion classroom. Once a week, I present a lesson in their classroom, as well as see them individually. I write a song to go with the story. I believe the music is effective since both sides of the brain are utilized. The children have their own individual tape to listen to at home. Visual aids are also introduced.

One of the themes I developed was *recess.* We made an audiotape as well as a videotape of this lesson. As an extended activity, the third graders made a book titled, *What Am I Supposed To Do At Recess?* During the lesson, the children brain stormed ideas of activities to participate in during recess. I also introduced the idea of the "thought drawing" and the "color green for good ideas" from Comic Strip Conversations. I wrote the social story, *Playing Kick Ball.* Tim and John practiced the game at recess with their classmates, myself, and the occupational therapist.

Other themes I developed were "raising my hand" and "look and listen". Social Stories were developed to reinforce each theme. Tim uses the raising hand skill consistently:

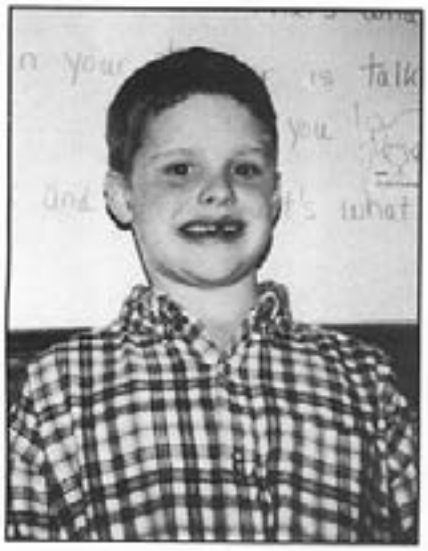
Raising My Hand

When the teacher is talking to the class, the children are usually quiet. When someone wants to say something, they usually raise their hand and wait for the teacher to call on them.

When the teacher is talking to the class, I will try to be quiet and listen. When I want to say something , I will try to remember to raise my hand and wait for the teacher to call on me.

The teacher will be happy if I try to be quiet and listen. The teacher will be happy if I raise my hand before I talk.

Pictured above: *Tim . . a student at Nathanael Greene School, Pawktucket, R.I.*



Pictured above: *John a student at Nathanael Greene School, Pawtucket, Rhode Island. In the background is an additional visual aid, "Look and Listen".*

Looking While Listening

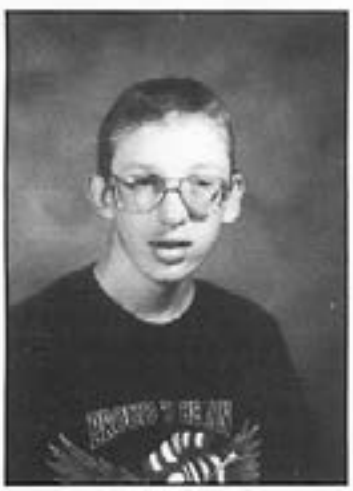
When someone is talking, I try to listen. This is a very nice thing to do. If I look at the ceiling and other things in the room, the other person may not know I am listening.

Sometimes I can try to look at their eyes or some part of their face. When I look at their face, the other person knows I am listening to them.

The person I am talking to will like this a lot.

Some of the other stories I have used are: *Drinking Milk at Lunch, Going on a Field Trip, Going to Reading, Going to the Ball Game, Pigeons at Recess, Playing Basketball, Playing Sports, Silent Reading, Sitting in My Chair, When a Child is Mean to Me,* and *Why I Eat Lunch.*

I believe in the effectiveness of Social Stories, and I hope others may benefit from my ideas.



Editor's note: *Mike is a sophomore at Grand Haven High School, in Grand Haven, Michigan. Mike enjoys listening to music. He likes classic rock. Mike's favorite blues musicians are Eric Clapton and Janis Joplin. He also likes Aerosmith, Fleetwood Mac, and southern music. Mike wrote the poem,"My Psalm of Life" this past fall.*

My Psalm of Life

Riding in an out of control bulldozer,

Slipping on ice.

Tough, strong, independent,

I am not going to be a part of the system.

Semi-religious, determined, shadowy,

I pray.

A Musical Path To Social Skills

- Jeanne Lyons

Photo by: Laura Inman Photography in Atlanta, Georgia

Editor's note: *Jeanne Lyons received her B.S. Ed. in Early Childhood/Elementary Education from the University of Virginia in 1984. She was very fortunate that her teaching career involved working with classes that fully included children with physical and behavioral disabilities. When her eight year old son Shawn was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome shortly before his fourth birthday, Jeanne began to advocate for inclusion from the other side of the fence, as a parent. Shawn attends Roswell Street Baptist Christian School in Marietta, Georgia. The school welcomed him as their first inclusion student, and allowed Jeanne to design his program. A social skills facilitator assisted Shawn and his classmates for his first two years of school, but now they're successfully and happily flying solo. Every gain that Shawn has made has been matched by his classmates' growth in understanding, compassion, and admiration.*

Jeanne, and her husband Rory, Shawn, and five year old Riley reside in Roswell, Georgia. Jeanne has begun to sing and present at autism conferences, but especially loves singing in classrooms and at school assemblies, teaching children about the autism spectrum.

Those of you who parent a child with an autistic spectrum disorder are probably becoming less and less surprised by the things you find yourself doing. I have spent time literally rolling on cement sidewalks with my son, keeping him safe during uncontrollable tantrums. I have also attended an International Carnivorous Plant Conference and visited a guinea pig breeder with him, helping him to gather more knowledge about his fascinating fixations. But one of the most incredible experiences of my life as the mother of a seven year old son who has Asperger's Syndrome was to find myself singing into a microphone in a recording studio. There I was in a little room that resembled a padded cell, recording a CD/cassette tape of songs that I had written. My songs were originally a musical attempt to teach my son and to amuse myself during our long commutes to therapy appointments. But this teaching strategy and coping strategy had somehow snowballed into a collection of songs for persons from all across the autism spectrum, and for those of us who love them.

I'm writing for this Social Story issue of THE MORNING NEWS because, like Social Stories, my songs have helped some people within the autism spectrum to make sense of some of the social expectations of NeuroTypical society. I have seen my songs help individuals with autism to modify some troublesome behaviors. Music seems to reach many individuals with autism in a powerful way, and the gains some have made through my songs seem to stem from an attitude that says, "Finally, someone explained this mysterious social rule in a way that I was able to absorb and comprehend!" Several of my songs are musical stories that emphasize how other people feel when unwritten social rules are not followed. The songs also give suggestions on how and why to follow the social rules and often end by telling the good things that can happen when the rules *are* followed.

I think you might understand more completely when you read some of the song titles. *Big Wild Wooly Fear* has helped my son Shawn and me to deal with the worries that attack him from time

to time. His worries can escalate to amazing proportions and hurl him into the tantrums he wants so desperately to avoid. We use the song to discuss why a tantrum occurred and to plan future strategies for dealing with worries. *Personal Space Invader* is a song that helps us to make it through the craft store without mowing down the people who foolishly leave a 1/2 inch of space between themselves and the colored pencil display. (Shawn is learning that the 1/2 inch of space in not there for him to squeeze through so he can investigate whether or not the pencils have been arranged in correct rainbow sequence.) *Perseveration Station* is our favorite tool for transitioning to another topic when one of his favorite topics, such as guinea pig genetics, has just about been beaten to death. *It's OK to Play Differently (The Arranging Song)*, explains that Shawn's preference for arranging toys, rather than playing with them in a more traditional sense, is a fine form of solitary play. But when other children join in, they need and want to be able to share their own play ideas. The song explains that there are times and places for both kinds of play: the "Shawn Way", and the way that allows for other viewpoints.

My CDitape is entitled *Gather Stars For Your Children: Songs to Enhance Social Skills and to Foster a Welcoming Attitude*. It actually contains three categories of songs. Some, like those described above, are tools for teaching social skills. Other songs help provide information about the autism spectrum to classmates, friends, family etc. *Christina* is a song that tells the story of a girl who is severely affected by her autism, but has a lot to give and many important lessons to teach to the NeuroTypical peers in her inclusion classroom. Other songs, like *You Are My Child*, are to be encouraging to parents, teachers, therapists, and other care givers. I describe in this song the ways I want to feel about my son and his disability. It helps me to remember what's important on the days when I have a hard time being as positive as I would like to be. Many of the songs blend into more than one of these categories.

Those of us who grew up with *Schoolhouse Rock* on Saturday mornings know the power music has to teach and to aid in retaining what has been learned. Many parents have discovered that their child within the autism spectrum can understand and follow sung directions much more easily than spoken directions. How many of us have met children who can sing with a fluidity that is often lost when they try to speak? I pulled these experiences together (as well as my experiences as a former teacher) as I wrote my music and somehow got up the nerve to sing my songs at autism support groups and workshops. Parents began to tell me that their children needed my songs, but an adult with autism helped give me the courage to actually make a recording of my songs.

Thomas McKean is a popular speaker at autism conferences, because he describes with so much insight and humor what it is like to live a full life, while coping with autism. When he spoke at a conference I attended near my home in Atlanta, I gave him a very rough tape of my music on the first day of the conference and asked him to tell me what he thought about it. He responded on the second day of the conference by asking me to sing one of my songs with him during his keynote address. He had brought his guitar along as he usually does. Ten minutes after his request, I found myself singing *Christina* to a few hundred people while Thomas strummed along. (Remember, that he had heard this song for the first time, just the night before, and there had been no time for us to rehearse it together.) We received, to my complete and utter amazement, a standing ovation. Thomas said he knew that was going to happen, and then later that day he was even trying to encourage someone to provide financial backing so I could make a professional recording of my songs. He even offered his musical talent for the project.

I ended up having to do the project on my own, with the enormous and absolutely essential assistance and moral support of my family and friends. My parents found and booked the recording studio because I was just too overwhelmed to "start the ball rolling". My wonderful husband, Rory, took it upon himself to learn how to do all of the parenting jobs that I tended to do, so I could work on the recording process, muddle through the business details and go off to sing at autism conferences, knowing he had everything under control. What a man! Logistics prevented us from involving Thomas's musical talents, but he had provided tremendous encouragement. Thanks Thomas!

My songs have been used in many different ways, more than I had imagined; but then providing support for and loving a person with an autistic spectrum disorder seems to inspire all

kinds of creative energy. I have even been told of a child who packs my music and a portable CD player in his backpack, in case he needs to briefly retreat to a musical reminder to have flexibility during the stresses of his preschool activities. *Flexibility* is one of my songs, and his teacher provides him with a private place to listen to it when he feels the need.

I love singing my songs at school assemblies that teach disability awareness to all the children in the school. The songs help the NeuroTypical peers to understand the actions of inclusion classmates who have invisible disabilities like autism. Parents have made gifts of my tapes and CDs to the teachers, therapists, and other professionals who work with their children. Sometimes the gift is given to express appreciation, and sometimes it is given to prepare a professional for a new client, by parents who have grown accustomed to *sometimes* having to be the ones who must train the professionals in both methods and attitudes. One of the most interesting uses for my songs has been as a way to open a meeting where policies would be decided regarding programs for persons in the autism spectrum. The songs were meant to be pre-meeting heart softeners. The tactics some parents will resort to! Sometimes the songs just help family members and support persons to sit back and indulge in a hearty laugh or a good cry.

I have a hard time answering the people who ask me what age levels the songs on my CD/tape are directed toward. It all depends upon the person. One of my favorite songs in the collection is called *Jody's Song*. Jody McElvoy is a real person, a beautiful woman in her late twenties who has autism. The song attempts to describe the difficulties she has faced, the strength and love within her, and a wish for greater understanding between those who encounter the autism spectrum and those who live it. Jody carries the tape with her song on it, inside her purse. My son was the catalyst for something that has made a difference for another person.

To order *Gather Stars For Your C[illegible]*

Jeanne L[illegible]
For Know[illegible]

PAST THE 'USE BY' DATE. Information and/or forms in this section are no longer accurate or usable. Please disregard.

[illegible] ...e tax
for ...andling costs
will ...ge and $2.00 per CD.
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In the next issue of THE MORNING NEWS:

ending!
Social Stories with more than one ending? and other ideas by Carol Gray
ending.

Social Skills Stories by Ann Johnson

Coaching children through tough times by Connie Langland

...and much more!

Behavioral Issues and the Use of Social Stories

- Beverly Vicker

Editor's note: *Beverly Vicker, during her fifteen years with the Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, has been involved in programs that focus on assessment, direct service, training, product development, and research regarding persons with autism. Prior to her tenure in Indiana, Beverly facilitated some of the early work in the area of augmentative - alternative communication while at the University of Iowa Hospital School.*

A frequent positive programming recommendation for an individual with autism is that the family or the staff of an agency develop one or more "social stories" to present particular information or to address specific situations. Such a recommendation may reflect either a proactive or reactive programming stance. Regardless of its purpose, the development and use of social stories is often a task that is underestimated in terms of its complexity or one that may simply be misunderstood. This article will attempt to identify some of the issues that should be considered when using this intervention tool.

"Social stories" have become a popular programming buzzword. Trainings about the development and use of social stories can represent quite varied experiences on the inservice market. This may occur because "social stories" is both a program-specific term and a generic term. The program-specific term was initially used by Carol Gray as a descriptor for her intervention strategies. As readers of the *MORNING NEWS* already know, Carol has presented her information at many conferences and has published various print resources regarding the programming and materials developed and piloted within her school district. *(Her materials are presently available from Future Horizons and are protected under the registered trademark of Social Stories Unlimited™, although most people simply use the term "social stories".)*

"Social stories" as a generic term currently refers to print- or text-supported picture material that presents information or scripting. The informal intervention concept pre-dates the program introduced by Carol. The informal "stories" may or may not be stories in the sense of having a plot or a narrative form. Rather, they may be descriptive of a situation or outline the steps in a sequence or process. Some forms might be called "social scripts". People who talk about social stories in this generic sense may or may not be utilizing any of the guidelines of Carol's program. These "stories/scripts", however, can also represent a legitimate means of providing visual information and support for a person with a social/language-processing disability.

Whether one chooses to follow Carol's guidelines or not, much can be learned by looking at her program and at the considerations regarding its implementation. The development of social stories, as defined by Carol, places a central focus on writing the stories in a positive tone. A given story may have an impact on the reduction of a specific behavior because of the information and insight it provides for the person with autism. The stories are not meant to be judgmental or to be strongly directive. In order to avoid the latter tone, Carol developed her published guidelines regarding the ratio of sentence types for each social story. The stories try to help the person with autism have a better understanding of the parameters of a problem situation and to have some idea of how to cope, manage, or operate

within that situation. Social stories usually are not a unilateral means of changing behavior or the performance of the person with autism. More typically, social stories may represent only one intervention strategy out of several that may be needed in order to impact or reverse a given situation. For example, if John experiences much frustration in the classroom and he releases some of his tension by hitting other students on the playground, his positive program might involve many components. It might include a social story about being a good friend and sharing, but it may also include a reassessment of his academic skills and the subsequent addition of extra academic support, the adaptation of work assignments, in service training for support staff to increase daily instances of positive interaction, general instruction regarding social skills, and specific teaching of playground games and rules in order to facilitate successful outdoor play. The social story might not be effective enough by itself to modify the complex situation such as John's frustration and aggression, but it might have a powerful impact when combined with other tailored strategies.

Factors to consider when writing a social story for an individual include the following:

- Know that social stories will not work with everyone. For some individuals, they may be inappropriate; for others, they may be especially inadequate, if used as a *sole* intervention tool.

- Know Carol's guidelines and the literature regarding the writing of good social stories, even if you choose not to use her approach.

- Gather appropriate information about the complexities of the situation before attempting to write a social story.

- Consider doing a positive programming behavior analysis with the key people involved in a situation before writing a social story.

    - Identify the cluster of strategies needed for circumventing or managing a certain situation. The development of a social story could be a high or low priority, depending on the individual situation. One or more stories may be needed when the strategy is appropriate.

    - A story should only be written if one has some idea of WHY, i.e. for what purpose(s) the individual is engaging in a specific behavior. A story may have a totally inappropriate focus or present an irrelevant set of information if the person is engaging in a behavior for a different reason than what is covered in the social story.

    - A behavior analysis would also identify the frequency of a behavior and if it is specific to a given setting or person. Sometimes ignoring a specific behavior is a better positive programming strategy than making an effort to call attention to it.

- View the social stories in the books available from Future Horizons only as examples of how to write a positive story. It is important to remember that each story should be written for a specific child. The child or student may have different factors that need to be considered or addressed than what appear in the example story. Many of the sample stories were written, under Carol's supervision, by high school students in psychology classes. Family members and adult staff, who have broader experiences and more personal knowledge of the person for whom the stories are intended, may incorporate some different insights and information into their narratives.

- Have other people review the story before presenting it to the person with autism. Consider involving a speech language pathologist in the review process since language comprehension is frequently an issue. The reviewer will want to consider:

- *The agenda or purpose of the story.*

  Is the story written with the objective of promoting self management, positive self esteem, a better understanding of the seemingly confusing world around him or her, and with recognition of what is difficult for people with autism?

- *The level of language used in the story*

  Does the child know the vocabulary?

  Is the grammar too complex or are sentences too detailed? Conversely, is the text level too simple for someone with more sophisticated language skills?

• *The processing demands of the story*

Are some steps or any information missing? Does the individual have to make inferences that he or she can not easily make? Is the story line brief but too complex? Is the individual missing some prior experiences or basic understanding that will make comprehension more difficult? Is it clear how the individual might handle a situation in a positive manner in the future?

• *A positive message*

Is the story more of a "thou shalt not. . ." commandment than a positive source of information? Does the thrust of the story depend on the individual being empathetic and understanding of the feelings of others (*something that is difficult for the person with autism*)? Does the story try to foster a feeling of guilt or shame,e.g., don't do "X" so Mommy will be proud of you?

• *The plan for the use of social stories*

Has a plan been devised about who will introduce the social story, who will supervise use, and who will monitor and revise the plan or story, as needed?

Just as social stories may be one piece of a behavior or postivive programming plan, it is also important to remember that stories represent one strategy when attempting to teach social skills. Multiple strategies are usually needed in this area as well. Numerous books, articles, and materials are available as resources for developing and implementing a social skills training program. Resources to provide additional information about positive programming and positive behavior support components include:

Carr, E. G., Levin, L., McConnachie, G., Carlson, J. I., Kemp, D.C. & Smith, C.E. (1994). Communication-based intervention for problem behavior: A user's guide for producing positive change. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Company.

Demchak, M.A. & Bossert, K. W. (1996). Assing problem behaviors. Washington, DC: American Association for Mental Retardation.

Koegel, L.K., Koegel, R.L., & Dunlap, G. (1996). Positive behavioral support: Including people with difficult behavior in the community. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Company).

Quill, K. (Ed.) (1996). Teaching students with autism: Methods to enhance learning, communication, and socialization. New York, NY: Delmar Publishers.

Beverly Vicker, M.S., CCC-SLP, Title: Speech Language Consultant, Indiana Resource Center for Autism, Institute for the Study of Developmental Disabilities, Indiana University Bloomington, IN