

Module 3: Story Supports

Where do they come from?

- Carol Gray www.carolgraysocialstories.com
- Overtime they have been much used, abused and misused
- Stories should be positive, promote understanding and information

Stories can be used to support your student in many ways. Three main types discussed here are:¹

1. **Stories for Self-Esteem** - positive stories about your student's behaviour and learning, used to enhance your student's self-esteem and confidence at school.
2. **Stories for Information** – practical information in story form, used to reduce your student's anxiety about changes in routine and new activities, and to help them understand timetables and future events.
3. **Stories for Understanding** – explanations of misunderstood communications or expected behaviour, used to enhance your student's comprehension of the hidden curriculum and expected social behaviour.


The goal of the story supports is to share accurate information meaningfully and safely, but not to change the student's behaviour. If the student feels nagged by such stories, they are not likely to take notice.

Remember using the child's special interest can help them connect with the story and/or help with their understanding.

Power Cards

Spiderman Needs Help

Even a superhero like Spiderman needs help sometimes. Not even a superhero can do everything alone. At first, Spiderman was scared to ask for help. He didn't want people to think he was weak. He also didn't want people interrupting him when he didn't need help. Then Spiderman had a great idea. He could raise his hand to let people know when he needed help. This would keep them from interrupting, but also get him help when he needed it. When we need help, we can raise our hand just like Spiderman.



¹ This approach is developed from Carol Gray's Social Stories™. You can find out more from her website at www.CarolGraySocialStories.com.

Types of Stories

Stories for Self-Esteem

When you are writing stories for your student, always start with a positive story about something they have done well. Make sure you regularly write stories to support your student's self-esteem and reinforce positive behaviour.

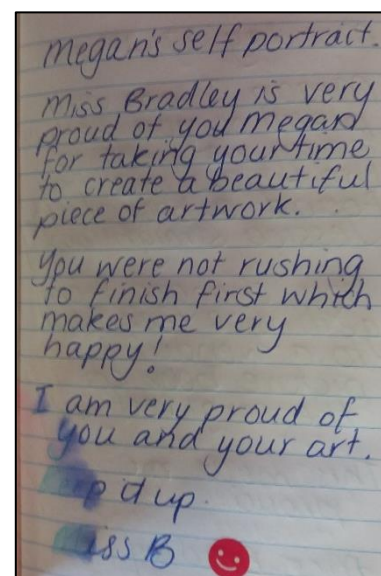
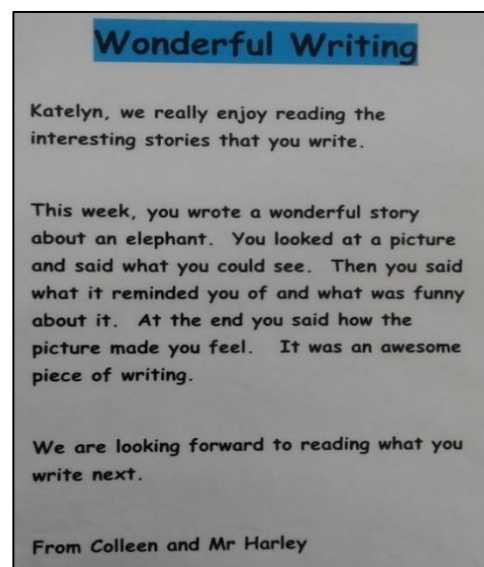
- Verbal praise is often not enough
- Written word with pictures can provide better memories
- Praising for what they have done well highlights what is important
- Can be useful in helping them to overcome challenges

The subject of a story could be:

- Something your student did which reinforces the behaviours you want to see.
- Something new they learned.
- Something they did really well.

Here are the steps to write a story for self-esteem:

1. Think of a title that describes the situation clearly and simply.
2. Start with some known information.
3. Describe in clear, simple language what the student did that was good.
4. Finish with an affirming sentence that describes your positive feelings.
5. Include the student in the writing process, if appropriate.
6. Read the story often with the student. Keep it in a 'brag book'.
7. Send the story home, if appropriate, so family can read it with the student too.





Classroom Snapshot:

The student had had a brilliant day at school, so the teacher decided to email the student and the parent that evening. The following morning the parent came to school, holding back tears, to inform the teacher after four years of schooling, this was the first email she had received saying how well he had done. She also said he had been beaming with smiles all evening and was looking forward to coming to school!

Stories for Information

This is a specific use of stories to ensure your student understands important information, and to reduce anxiety when routines change.

There are many occasions during the school day when unexpected events occur, or events get cancelled and are replaced by something else. Sufficient warnings of such events through 'stories for information' can help tilt the seesaw away from the scary 'changeable' side for the student with autism.

Here is what a parent of a child with autism says about the usefulness of stories for information:

"The amount of time it takes to write and read a story for information before a change occurs is far shorter than the time taken up reacting to the difficulties and behaviour caused by an unprepared change."

Here are the steps to write a story for information:

1. Think of the title that describes the situation clearly and simply.
2. Start with some known information.
3. Describe in clear, simple language what is going to happen or what is going to change
4. Include the student as much as possible in the writing process.
5. Read the story often with the student.
6. Send the story home, if appropriate, so family can read it with the student too.

Example of a story for information:

Swimming on Wednesdays

My name is _____

Usually on Wednesdays we go swimming.

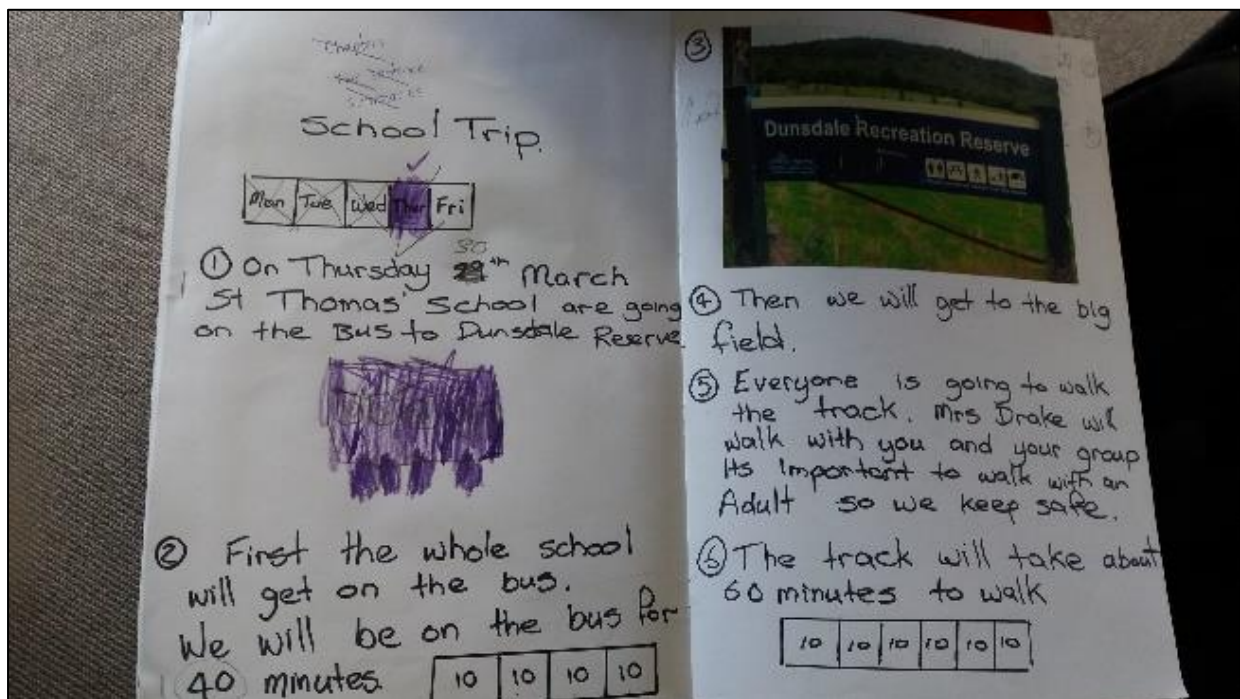
Today the swimming pool is closed. This means we have to do something different.

The teacher is going to take all the children into the gym and play games.

I can watch from the side of the gym if this makes me feel safer.

I can join in the games too.

Remember this type of story is written for the whole class/school.



Note:

- The calendar coloured in by the child under the title
- Time passing at the bottom of both pages
- Explanation - what, where and why
- On the next page they also pointed out they would return to school



Classroom Snapshot: Using a story for information – no swimming this Wednesday

Joshua usually goes swimming on Wednesdays. This Wednesday, there will be no swimming because the pool is being drained. The class will go to the gym instead.

On Monday, the teacher writes this as a story for information in Joshua's home-school book. His Mum can then read him the story on Wednesday morning to remind him that there will be no swimming that day, and that he will go to the gym instead.

Stories for Understanding

Stories and reviews of conversations can greatly enhance understanding of social interaction for students with autism. The goal of stories for understanding (just like Carol Grey's Social Stories™) is to convey a message of understanding to the student in a relevant, unthreatening way.

Use stories for understanding to explain incidents with other students or situations such as the hidden curriculum or other 'everybody knows that' situations!

Example of a story for understanding:

Arriving at music lessons on time

My name is Isabella.

Students go to music lessons to learn new songs.

There are start and finish times for each lesson.

The start time means this is when the teacher is usually ready to start the lesson.

It is good to arrive before the start time. This means I won't miss out on some of my lesson.

I will try to arrive at my music lesson room on time.

Further guidelines for writing stories for understanding are to follow.

Remember that these stories are not intended for behavioural change. While behaviours may change as a result of your student learning from the story, your goal must always be to help the student understand the situation or event.

Social stories can take many forms. E.g. Videos of their class mates role playing desired responses or You Tube clips can also be useful.

E.g. Daniel Tiger

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Daniel+Tiger

Guidelines for Writing Stories for Understanding

Following are some factors to consider when writing stories for understanding. Most of these guidelines apply to all types of stories, but some are specific to stories for understanding. Social Stories™ have a clear set of rules to follow².

1. Research

Before writing, gather information that helps you write the story. Answer these questions:

- What is the situation about?
- How can I present this relevantly to the student?
- What will give more understanding for the student at this point?

2. Reading Age

Consider the age and ability of the student when writing. Is there information that can be reinforced through picture? Use clear and precise language and simple sentences, taking into account the reading age of the student. But take care not to make it simplistic, as some older students may find stories patronising if they are 'written down to'.

3. Format

Hand-written stories can be fine for younger students. For older students, sometimes emails or texts can be used, or the stories can be written in an information book style with bullet points, headings and chapters.

4. Tone

The tone of the story should be supportive, not nagging or as a reminder of rules. Using the third person voice often takes the nagging tone away and takes pressure off the student.

For example, say '*Usually all the children go to assembly*', rather than '*You should go to assembly*'.

² www.carolgraysocialstories.com

5. Structure

Like all good stories, these ones need a beginning, a middle, and an end.

There are four parts to these stories:

1. **Title** – summarising the topic
2. **Introduction** – explaining the topic
3. **Body** – telling about the event or behaviour
4. **Conclusion** – reinforcing the main message

The title should summarise the story, so that if the student reads nothing but the title, they will understand what it is about. An accurate title also helps you to stay on track with your writing. It should summarise the main point you are trying to get across.

For example, *'Being quiet in assembly'*, rather than just *'Going to assembly'*.

The conclusion helps to reinforce the main message of the story.

For example, *'All the children try to be quiet in assembly'*, rather than *'You must be quiet during assembly'*.

6. Individualise

Use your knowledge of the student to individualise the story. Always include their name. Use photos of them or let them add drawings of themselves.

Use their strengths or interests to catch their attention or provide a context.

7. Edit

Ask someone else to check the story before you read it with your student. Another eye often spots something that you understand but someone else would not.

8. Keep

Keep stories you write in a book. You can continue to use them with the student to reinforce preferred behaviour. They can also form a record of the progress the student has made.

Lets Look at This One

Learning to help others

Helping is doing something for another person. Being helpful is kind and thoughtful.

Sometimes people ask for help. My mum may ask me to carry a bag. She needs my help. Or, my dad asks me a question about the computer. He needs my help.

Other times people may need help but do not ask for it. When this happens, it's very nice to offer help.

There are many ways that I can be helpful. (Carol Gray, New Social Story Book)

Types of Sentences

There are five particular types of sentences to use in these stories, each of which has a different purpose.

1. Descriptive sentences: These make up most of the story. They are factual, objective, and free of assumption and debate. For example, *'There are seven days in a week'*.

2. Perspective sentences: These are sentences that describe how other people may be feeling or what they may be thinking about. For example, *'Lots of people think playing sport is a fun thing'*.

3. Coaching sentences: These describe a way of doing something or a suggested response. They are often misused as a 'stick' to tell the student what to do.

There should be a ration of at least two other sentences to one coaching sentence. Used well, they coach not only the student but also others around them. For example, *'Mrs Clark will try to give me more time for the spelling test'*.

The coaching sentence may include options, such as *'I may choose to do _____ or _____.'* (See partial sentences, below).

4. Affirming sentences: These enhance what has gone before and emphasise it. They draw attention to that information and make it important.

For example:

- *All passengers wear seatbelts in cars. This is the law.*
- *Students walk in the school corridors. This is a rule.*
- *Sometimes students arrive late to school. This is okay.*
- *Usually, all students go to their own homes after school. This is okay.*

5. Partial sentences: Sometimes it can be helpful to leave out the word/s you want the student to remember.

Using such partial sentences includes the student in the creation of the story by getting them to fill in the blanks. They can act as a reminder of a suggested course of action or an important part of an event.

For example:

- *On Friday, we are going to the _____.*
- *Walking in the _____ is a school rule.*
- *Sometimes there are not enough scissors and rulers. _____ is a good thing to do.*

Teaching the Story

Sometimes the story will be written alongside the student. Sometimes it can be written first and then the student included by adding drawings, [photos of them](#) or filling in partial sentences.

Read the story with the student more than once. You can reinforce the message by sending it home for family members to read as well.

The best time to read these stories is when there is calm in the classroom. Such stories can be helpful for many children and not solely for the student with autism.

Beware of the internet. Always check the language and graphics follow the 10 rules.

Social Stories have been much abused and misused.

Make them pertinent to the child and what they need to know e.g.

Carol Grey was working with a child who loved math but would not put up their hand to participate in lessons. On chatting with the child Carol was asked "If the teacher doesn't know the answer to 5x6 then she's dumb and I'm not going to learn anything from her." A social story was needed to explain why teacher's ask questions. Make sure you are addressing their needs with the information they need to understand.

Lets Plan for These Things to be Successful

Video References

Carol Gray's official website where she explains what social stories are and gives examples <https://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

Carol gray explains some of the pitfalls when writing social stories www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjIYYbVIRI&t=51s

A set of free Social Stories from various resources on the internet. They have been classified according to categories that children with Autism may have difficulty with - remember to check that they adhere to the rules of effective social stories.

<https://www.abaresources.com/social-stories/>