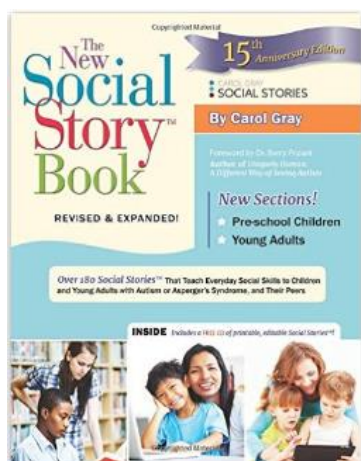


## **FAQ –Social Stories™**



The outreach team often recommend Social Stories™. Carol Gray defines these as “A social learning tool that supports the safe and meaningful exchange of information between parents, professionals and people with autism of all ages”. This help sheet is a summary of the questions we are asked most often. It will not tell you how to create or use Social Stories™; we would recommend that you buy the book and/or attend some training.

**Carol Gray's book:** The New Social Stories™ book by Carol Gray (2015) EDS Publications

For information about training in the south of England visit the Freemantles website:  
<http://www.freemantles.surrey.sch.uk/Accredited-Social-Stories-Training/>

You will also find a lot of useful information on Carol Gray's website;  
<http://carolgraysocialstories.com/>

**I have been advised by a visiting professional to write a Social Story™ to teach my young person not to hit/bite – is this correct?**

No! The goal of a Social Story™ is not to change behaviour. We are seeking to fill a gap in understanding or explain a new experience. A Story often involves an element of coaching to explain self- help strategies or to suggest suitable behaviours. This often has the happy side effect of improving behaviour, but it is not the aim. If a change in behaviour is sought, then an alternative strategy should be used, such as rules with a reward chart to reinforce.

**My young person gets angry when we read Social Stories™**

Social Stories™ often deal with difficult topics, which may be uncomfortable for a young person to read. If they are constantly faced with such stories, they may end up seeking to avoid reading more! This can be countered with the use of praise stories, which are written when a young person has achieved something. They can be formed from recycled versions of previously used Social Stories™, or written especially for the occasion. Praise Stories serve to raise self-esteem and help young people to accept and trust the format of Social Stories™.

We would recommend that a praise story should be the first sort of story that a young person encounters. Other ideas to try to encourage a good reception include:

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- Social Stories™ for a group of young people, as part of a tutorial or assembly
- Changing the format of the story e.g. Social Stories™ as PowerPoints or newspaper articles
- Making sure that the format of the story is age-appropriate and not patronising
- Using a young person's interests, either through illustrations or as a hypothetical character e.g. Sonic's first trip to the dentist
- Avoid writing in second person (i.e. "you") as this has a more judgemental and aggressive tone
- Consider the frequency with which a story is reviewed. Too many times and a young person will get bored.

Remember - never read Social Stories™ as punishment. In a heightened state of emotion, it is unlikely that your young person will process the information and more likely that they will build negative associations.

### **My young person is not interested in reading Social Stories™**

It is important to use a format which is meaningful and interesting to the young person; after all, we only feel motivated to read things we are interested in! Some things to think about are;

- A format / delivery of the Social Story™ which appeals to the young person. This could involve PowerPoints, Ipads, letters, emails, tape recordings, newspapers, mini-books, puppets and whatever your imagination can come up with!
- Using a young person's interests, either through illustrations or as a hypothetical character, or as part of the delivery e.g. a medieval scroll for a young person interested in knight
- Make the Story accessible and appropriate for the young person's interest and reading level
- If appropriate, get the young person involved in the writing of the story, or include an interactive element like 'fill in the blanks'
- Use of Praise Stories

### **I wrote a Social Story™ but it did not have the desired effect**

The most common reason for a failed Story is when the topic was not specific enough, or not properly addressing the issue at hand. For example, a story to explain how to initiate play at break time will not be effective if a young person is deliberately avoiding their peers due to sensory overload. It is important to fully investigate what the topic needs to be, through;

- Observations – both fly-on the wall and taking the young person's perspective
- Talking to the young person where possible
- Talking to the team (e.g. all of the people involved with that young person)
- Behaviour logs

It may turn out that a Social Story™ was not needed at all, but a different strategy!

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## **My young person has a low reading level. Can we still use a Social Story™?**

Stories can be simplified for very young child, or those with a low-literacy level through the use of symbols, pictures and reading the story out loud. Stories can be as short as three simple sentences. It is usually the case that a short, simple story can only convey one specific piece of information, so a Story Set might be needed to build up the information and to help a young person to generalise. For example, A story set to teach a young person about shopping might include 'Learning about trips to Tesco', 'Learning about trip to Next, 'Learning about trips to BnQ', then eventually 'Learning about going shopping'.

## **My young person seems to understand when we read the Social Story™, but forgets/can't keep control and the misunderstandings still arise**

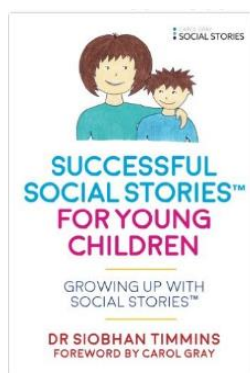
Some young people have a fantastic memory for Social Stories™, but others need additional cues. Some ideas include;

- Posters / visuals from the story illustrations to act as a reminder
- 'Taking the story on tour' i.e. re-reading with lots of different people
- Fill-in blanks stories
- Surveys of adult to reinforce the ideas in the story, such as asking adults 'Can you think of a time you made a mistake? How did you fix it/cope with it?'
- Keeping Social Stories™ in an accessible book or folder, so that a young person can review them whenever they want.

It can take a long time for a young person to alter rigid thinking and to form new 'scripts' for how to deal with a situation. We cannot expect changes overnight. A moment of instant revelation happens for some, but other young people take new ideas on board very gradually.

## **Why do I need to write a Story from scratch? I found this one on the internet / in a book...**

There are a lot of example stories online, but many of these have not been written well and may not be socially, emotionally or even physically safe, if they give false information or support a faulty rationale. It is important to use only Stories from a trusted source, such as



the disk in Carol Gray's book, or examples from the Freemantles team. These can be a helpful starting point, but a generic story still needs to be personalised for your young person and it is important make sure it really meets the desired topic. This book is produced by a member of Carol Gray's team and also has a lot of good Story examples;

Successful Social Stories™ for Young Children by Dr Siobhan Timmins

Updated in April 2020. The above advice is based on our experiences at Freemantles of working with children who have autism and related difficulties, as well as the knowledge and training of the Freemantles Social Stories™ Satellite School, who work directly with Carol Gray.

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