

## How To Write a Social Story: Step-By-Step

### **1. Decide What Kinds of Topics to Tackle in Your Social Story**

Social stories are normally written in first or third person, but never in second person. Writing a social story in second person diverts the story from being a descriptive story into being a directive one – that’s something you want to avoid.

Ideally, a social story should be written from the child’s perspective – “I went to the store” or “Adam went to the store” rather than “you went to the store.” They will answer the who, what, when, where, and why about a certain situation and the expected behaviour that you would like to teach the child.

Therefore, the first thing you need to do is to identify the situation you’d like to cover in the social story (goal). What kinds of situations do you find your child struggling in?

### **2. Vary Your Sentence Types**

Social stories should use both descriptive and “coaching” sentences. These “coaching” sentences are sometimes referred to as directive sentences, but that can be confusing given that we want the story to guide more than dictate.

Ideally, you should have at least two descriptive sentences for every coaching sentence. Descriptive sentences can be further broken down into factual, perspective, cooperative, and affirmative sentences.

Many people find it helpful to write one descriptive sentence followed by a directive/coaching sentence, then a cooperative and affirmative sentence. This kind of structure provides a nice “cause and effect” flow that might prove to be structured enough and helpful for children who struggle with abstract concepts.

Here is an example:

- **Descriptive Sentence:** I ride the bus to school.
- **Perspective Sentence:** Sometimes I get upset when I ride the bus because it is loud and crowded.
- **Directive/Coaching Sentence:** I can put on my headphones and listen to music when I feel upset on the bus.
- **Affirmative Sentence:** Staying relaxed on the bus is good for me.

Again, try to maintain a ratio of two descriptive sentences for every directive sentence to keep things more descriptive than directive.

### **3. Prepare the Story**

After you've selected the topic and come up with some ideas for sentences, it's time to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard!) and start crafting the story.

### **4. Add Some Pictures**

Next, you will need to add some pictures to the story. Put the picture above the text so there is a clear link between the picture and the sentence. The pictures should be clear and represent the meaning of the story – now is not the time for fancy graphics or abstract artistic renderings! If you can, use visual support pictures or actual photographs of the child and the chosen situation.

### **5. Create Copies**

Once you've written the social story and added in your pictures, you need to make copies and consider laminating it, too.

### **6. Introduce and Read the Story**

This is one of the most important steps in creating a social story, and one that tends to be forgotten. While the crafting and content of a social story are, of course, important, you also need to set aside ample amounts of time to read the story to the child. Make sure you choose the opportune time, introducing

the social story when the child is in an amenable, approachable mood and ready to learn.

Read through the story several times and have the child read along if possible. You can also discuss personal experiences and make connections to real-world situations to make the story even more relevant.

## **7. Practice and Provide Feedback**

After reading the story several times, consider role-playing to help further your child's understanding of the expectations. Use positive feedback when your child displays the expected behaviour after the social story is used, and don't throw the stories out when you think you might be finished with them. Hang on to them and keep them accessible so you can reread and practice more as necessary.

## **8. Bonus Step – Have the Child Help When Possible!**

Whenever possible, encourage the child to help you create his/her own social story. This will allow for more ownership and greater buy-in. You can guide the child with open-ended questions if necessary.