

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH AUTISM: SOCIAL STORIES™

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This is the third article in a series that discusses strategies for working with children who are deaf and have autism. The first article provided an overview of strategies to support communication at home and in the community. This article will provide an in-depth description and strategies for using Social Stories™, developed by Carol Gray. There is a significant amount of research related to Social Stories™ and children with autism proving them to be an effective tool that is a promising practice (Simpson, et al., 2005). However, we know little about effective interventions specifically for deaf children with autism. Though the research is lacking, the components of Social Stories™ may provide the support deaf children need in specific situations. Social Stories™ are written using a formula of descriptive, perspective, directive and affirmative and partial sentences (Gray, 2000). Parents will find resources and examples of this unique strategy at <http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories> .

Deaf children with autism face significant challenges in three areas: communication, behavior, and socialization (American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2000). Every day, whether at home, in school, or out in the community, is filled with numerous social activities (i.e., greeting friends, following instruction, and turn taking) where deaf students with autism are expected to interact and participate. These activities require skills from all three areas. Social stories provide text and visual support for deaf children with autism as they interact with others in a variety of settings and situations (Barry & Burlew, 2004). The stories are written to provide an individual with support through transitions or changes in routine, provide insight about others' perspectives, and present alternatives to problem behaviors (Kuoch & Mirenda, 2003).

Overview of Social Stories™

Social Stories™ are simple stories written from the child's perspective that describe a specific situation or event through both print and pictures (Spencer, Simpson, & Lynch, 2008). The stories illustrate, for the deaf student with autism, the positive and appropriate social behavior. Language used in social stories follow a specific format (typically 5-10 sentences): description of the situation, directive statements (let the child know how to appropriately respond), other people's perspectives and feelings, and a description of typical behaviors that may help the situation (Gray, 1995). It is important to note social stories are not used in isolation but should be included with other strategies (Spencer, Simpson, & Lynch, 2008). A critical component of the Social Story™ is to encourage a child or (The Gray Center, n.d.). The Gray

Center for Social Learning and Understanding provides an informative and parent friendly website (<http://www.thegraycenter.org/social-stories>)! There are video clips that provide information about the purpose and use of Social Stories™. Some of the clips have a button to display the transcribed text. The website also provides examples of Social Stories™.

Classroom Application

Social Stories™ can be written by any individual who is familiar with the child and the circumstances that are to be addressed (Simpson, et al., 2005). Teaching the appropriate behavior, helping a student prepare for a new activity, skill, event, or a routine by using social stories is facilitated by repeating the reading or signing of the story several times in preparation for the skill or event. Pictures or icons help to illustrate the story adding a visual support. The author writes the social story using language to match the child's level of understanding and the follows the prescribed formula. Pictures (drawings, clip art or photographs) are then added to provide visual representation of the concepts. Teachers read the story with the child, making sure he understands the concepts and the skills being addressed. Next, depending on the child, the child can read the story independently, read it aloud or sign the story, or have the story read or signed to them. Some may need to have the story read to them or read the story several times a day. The need for the social story decreases as the child begins to use the appropriate behavior. Finally, the teacher provides the child with opportunities to practice the skill. Throughout the school day, the teacher will prompt the child to use the skill focused on in the story whenever appropriate and praise the child for using the appropriate behavior (Spenser, Simpson, & Lynch, 2008).

Home and Community

The flexibility of Social Stories™ allows them to be used in any setting, to address a myriad of events! They can be used at home to help a child prepare for bedtime, getting ready for school, or making a scary situation less fearful. For example, if a child is afraid of a dog, reading the social story about meeting or visiting a dog may help the child prepare for seeing the dog and adjusting to the dog's behaviors (dogs bark, dogs lick people and so forth). If a child struggles with a concept at home and school, the same social story can be used. Families can adapt social stories teachers use at school to fit their situations at home. Finally, new social stories can be developed for families to use at home and in the community. It is important for families to remember to follow similar steps to the classroom application above. The child will need to be allowed to read or have the story read to them often and have opportunities to practice the skills presented in the story. The child will need to be praised often for choosing to use the appropriate behavior in the given situation.

Conclusion

Social stories are developed to support each individual through challenging social situations while working to improve communication, behavior, and social skills. In addition, they

can assist with bridging the gap between home and school. The next article in the series will discuss using power cards to continue supporting their development.

References

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