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Social Stories

for Life's Changes

Example stories to help neurodivergent children and young people understand new and difficult situations

Starting school, a new baby, moving house, bereavement and more — with tips and templates for writing your own

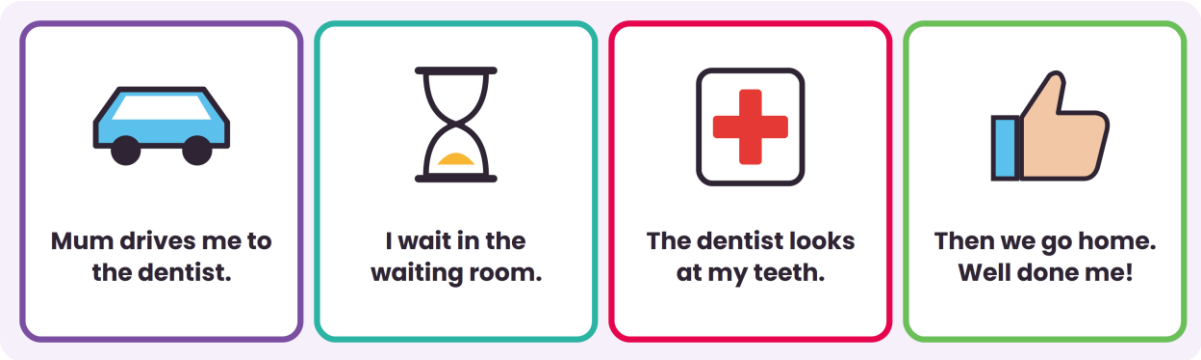
Read it | **Understand it** | **Feel ready**

What is a social story?

A short story that explains what is happening

A **social story** is a short, simple story that describes a situation, what usually happens and why. It helps a child or young person know what to expect, so new or difficult situations feel more predictable and less worrying.

The approach was developed by **Carol Gray** in 1991. Social Stories™ written to her full criteria are a registered approach; the stories in this booklet are **examples inspired by it** that you can adapt for your own child.



Social stories can help to…

- Prepare for a change or a new experience
- Explain something that is confusing or upsetting
- Share what other people might think or feel
- Celebrate things the person does well

How to use them

- Read the story together when the person is **calm**
- Start a few days or weeks before a change
- Read it often — repetition helps
- Let them keep a copy to look at on their own
- Never use a story as a punishment

What's inside

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Plus: how to write your own story, a blank template and where to find more help.

Writing your own story

Tips to make a story that works for your child

1. Find out what is hard

Watch, listen and ask. What part of the situation is confusing or worrying? Write the story about that.

2. Gather the facts

Who, what, where, when, why and how. Visit the place, take photos and find out what will really happen.

3. Write it their way

Use "I" for younger children, or "you" / third person for older ones. Match their reading level and interests.

4. Add pictures

Use real photos, symbols or drawings — whatever the person understands best. One idea per page.

Helpful kinds of sentences

Type	What it does	Example
Describing	Says what happens, where and who is there. Use lots of these.	"School starts at 8:45 in the morning."
Perspective	Explains what other people think or feel.	"My teacher is happy to see me."
Coaching	Gently suggests what the person could do. Use only a few.	"I can try to put my coat on my peg."
Reassuring	Calms worries and celebrates.	"This is okay." "I did it!"

Do

- Keep it positive, calm and honest
- Use words like **usually**, **sometimes** and **might**
- Explain **why** things happen
- Use the real names of people and places

Try to avoid

- Promises like **always** and **never** — things can change
- Lots of "must" and "don't" sentences
- Figures of speech that could be taken literally
- Writing about something negative the person did

1 Starting school

Soon I will start at **[school name]**. Lots of children go to school.

On school days I wear my school uniform. My uniform is **[colour]**.

My teacher is called **[name]**. My teacher is there to help me.

I will hang my coat and bag on my peg. My peg has my name on it.

There will be other children in my class. Some of them are new too.

At lunchtime I will eat my lunch with the other children.

If I feel worried or need help, I can tell my teacher or show my help card.

At the end of the day **[name]** will pick me up and I will go home.

Going to school is new. After a while, it will feel more familiar.

Make it personal

- Add photos of the school, classroom, peg and teacher
- Read it every day for a few weeks before the start date
- Make a visual timetable of the school day to go with it

2 Moving to secondary school

In September you will move to **[school name]**. Moving to secondary school is a big change for everyone in Year 7.

Secondary schools are bigger. You will have a timetable to help you find your way.

Lessons are in different rooms with different teachers. A bell or a change of time tells you when to move.

Your form tutor is **[name]**. You will see them every day, and they are a good person to talk to.

Lots of students get confused in the first few weeks. Teachers expect this, and it is okay to ask for directions.

If the corridors feel too busy or loud, you can **[use your exit pass / leave a few minutes early / go to the learning support base]**.

If something is worrying you, you can speak to **[name of trusted adult]**.

Most students find that after a few weeks the new school starts to feel normal.

Make it personal

- Use photos from transition visits and the school website
- Go through the timetable and map together over the summer
- Agree what the young person can do if they feel overwhelmed and add it to the story

3 A new baby in our family

For children expecting a brother or sister

[Name] is going to have a baby. The baby will be my brother or sister.

The baby is growing inside **[name]**'s tummy. The baby will be born around **[month]**.

When the baby is ready to be born, **[name]** might go to hospital. **[Name]** will look after me while they are there.

Babies need lots of help. They cry, sleep, feed and need their nappies changed.

Babies sometimes cry loudly. Crying is how babies talk. If the noise is too much, I can use my headphones or go to my quiet space.

Mum and Dad will be busy with the baby, but they still love me just as much.

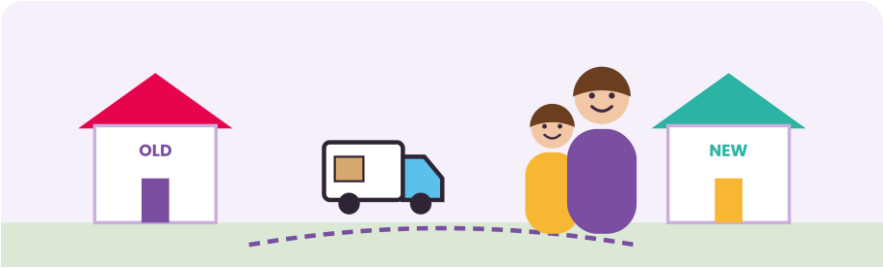
I can help if I want to, like choosing a toy or saying hello to the baby.

There will still be time for me. We will have special time together for **[activity]**.

Make it personal

- Change “Mum and Dad” to the right family names
- Plan who will look after the child during the birth and add it in
- Keep some of the child's routines the same after the baby arrives

4 Moving to a new house



My family is going to move to a new house. Our new address is **[address]**.

We will move on **[day and date]**. I can count down the days on my calendar.

Before we move, we will pack our things into boxes. I can help pack my own things.

On moving day, a van will take our boxes and furniture to the new house. Nothing will be left behind.

My bed and my favourite things are coming with me. My new bedroom will be **[describe it]**.

We will get the keys and go inside our new home together.

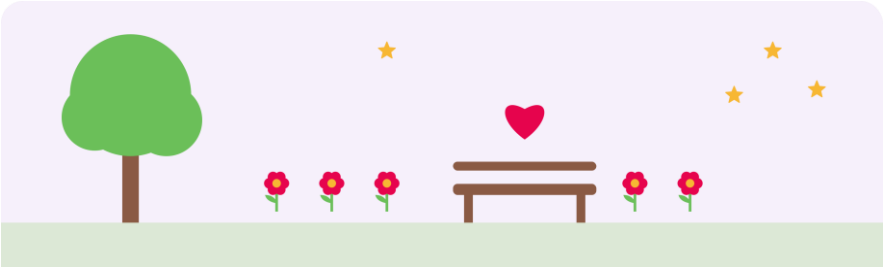
Moving can feel strange. I might miss my old house, and that is okay.

After a while, the new house will start to feel like home.

Make it personal

- Add photos of the new house, bedroom, street and nearby places
- Pack a “first night” box with favourite items, bedding and comforters
- Set up the child's bedroom first, as close to the old one as possible

5 When someone dies



[Name] has died. When someone dies, their body stops working. They cannot breathe, eat, talk or feel pain anymore.

When someone has died, they cannot come back. I will not see **[name]** again, but I can remember them.

When someone dies, people feel lots of different things. They might feel sad, angry, confused or worried. Some people cry, and some people do not.

All feelings are okay. My feelings might change from day to day.

I can ask questions about **[name]**. The grown-ups around me will try to answer them honestly.

I can remember **[name]** by looking at photos, making a memory box or talking about them.

There might be a funeral. A funeral is a time when people say goodbye and remember the person.

If I feel sad, I can tell **[name of trusted person]** or get a hug. People still love and care for me.

Make it personal

- Use clear words such as “died” and “dead”. Avoid phrases like “lost”, “gone to sleep” or “passed away”, which can be confusing
- Add your family's beliefs about what happens after death, if you wish
- You can adapt this story for the death of a pet
- For support, contact Child Bereavement UK (0800 02 888 40) or Winston's Wish — see “Where to find more help”

6 Going to the doctor for an injection

Vaccinations and blood tests

On **[day]** I am going to the doctor's surgery for an injection. An injection helps keep my body healthy.

First, I will wait in the waiting room. I can bring something to do while I wait.

The nurse will call my name. The nurse will tell me what they are going to do.

The nurse will clean my arm and give the injection. It might feel like a quick scratch or pinch. It is over very quickly.

I can look away, squeeze a toy or take slow, deep breaths.

Afterwards I might have a plaster on my arm. My arm might feel a bit sore for a day or two.

Then the injection is finished. I did it!

After the doctor's I will **[reward or nice activity]**.

Make it personal

- Ask the surgery for the first or last appointment of the day
- Ask about numbing cream or a quiet waiting space
- Change the wording for a blood test or a dental visit

7 Having my hair cut

Sometimes my hair gets long. Then it is time for a haircut.

I will have my hair cut at **[place]** by **[name]**.

I will sit in a chair. The hairdresser might put a cape around me to keep the hair off my clothes.

The hairdresser will use a comb and scissors or clippers. Clippers buzz and might feel tickly.

If the noise is too much, I can wear my headphones or ask for scissors instead.

If I need a break, I can say “stop” or show my break card. The hairdresser will wait.

Having my hair cut takes about **[time]**. I can watch the timer.

Then my haircut is finished. My hair is shorter and tidy.

Make it personal

- Ask the hairdresser for a quiet time of day
- Practise at home with a cape, comb and spray bottle
- Some people prefer a haircut at home

8 When plans change

Most days I know what is going to happen. I like knowing my plan.

Sometimes plans change. This might be because someone is ill, the weather is bad or something unexpected happens.

When plans change, I might feel worried, cross or upset. That is okay.

A grown-up will try to tell me about the change and why it is happening.

I can look at my timetable to see the new plan. I might see a “change” card.

I can take some deep breaths or use my calm-down activity.

Even when plans change, I am safe. Lots of changes turn out okay.

Make it personal

- Use a “change” or “surprise” symbol on visual timetables
- Practise small, planned changes when the person is calm
- Give as much warning as possible about changes

9 When the fire alarm rings

At school or in a public place

Sometimes the fire alarm rings at school. This is called a fire drill. It helps everyone practise staying safe.

The fire alarm is very loud. It is loud so that everyone can hear it. I can cover my ears or wear my ear defenders.

When I hear the alarm, I stop what I am doing and listen to the teacher.

I walk out of the building with my class. I do not need to take my things.

We line up outside at the meeting point. The teacher counts everyone to check we are all safe.

We wait until a grown-up says it is safe to go back inside.

Then we go back to class. I did a good job of staying safe.

Make it personal

- Ask school to warn the child before planned fire drills
- Agree a named adult to help them during a drill
- Keep ear defenders easy to reach

10 When I have big feelings

Anger, worry and overwhelm

Sometimes I have big feelings, like anger, worry or frustration. Everyone has big feelings sometimes.

Big feelings can happen when things are too loud, too busy, unfair or hard to understand.

My body might feel hot, my heart might beat fast or I might want to shout, cry or run.

When I notice a big feeling, I can ask for a break or go to my calm place: **[place]**.

I can breathe slowly — in through my nose, and out through my mouth.

Other things that help me are **[e.g. headphones, squeezing, counting, music]**.

After a while the big feeling gets smaller. I start to feel calm again.

When I am calm, I can talk about what happened with someone I trust.

Make it personal

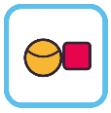
- Work out the person's own early signs and calming strategies together
- Use a feelings scale (1–5) alongside this story
- Never read it during a meltdown — read it when everyone is calm

11 Going to a birthday party

I have been invited to **[name]**'s birthday party. It is on **[day]** at **[place]**.

Parties can be busy, noisy and exciting. There might be balloons, music and games.

There will be other children there. I can say hello or wave.



I can join in with the games if I want to or watch for a while first.

There might be a birthday cake. Everyone sings “Happy Birthday”, and then the birthday child blows out the candles.

If it gets too much, I can tell **[name]** and have a break somewhere quieter.

At **[time]** the party ends, and I go home.

Make it personal

- Ask the host what will happen at the party
- Agree a signal for “I need a break” or “I want to go home”
- It is fine to stay for only part of the party

12 My body is growing up

As children grow into teenagers, their bodies change. This is called puberty. It happens to everyone.

Puberty usually starts somewhere between ages 8 and 14. Everyone's body changes at its own speed.

You will grow taller. Hair starts to grow in new places, such as under the arms.

Bodies start to sweat more. Showering or washing every day keeps your body clean and fresh.

Many people use deodorant every morning to help them smell fresh.

Puberty can bring new feelings too. Your moods might change more quickly. This is normal.

You can ask **[trusted adult]** any questions about your body. Questions are okay.

Make it personal

- Add the specific changes for the young person, such as periods, voice changes or shaving
- Use correct names for body parts
- Pair it with a visual routine for showering, deodorant and changing clothes

My social story

A template to write your own

Title:

1

2

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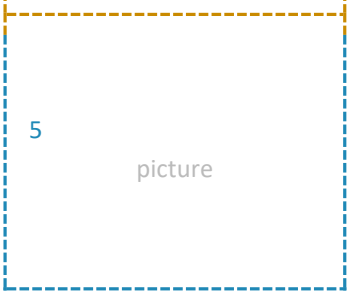

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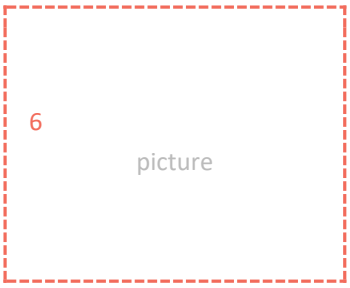

Where to find more help

Useful websites

Organisation	How they can help	Website and contact
Carol Gray Social Stories	Information from the creator of Social Stories™, including training and books.	carolgraysocialstories.com
National Autistic Society	Advice on autism, including communication and visual supports.	autism.org.uk
Child Bereavement UK	Support for grieving children, young people and families. Helpline 0800 02 888 40.	childbereavementuk.org
Winston's Wish	Support for children and young people after the death of someone important.	winstonswish.org
YoungMinds	Mental health information for young people and parents.	youngminds.org.uk
Sycamore Trust UK	Family Services support for autistic children, young people and their families. 020 8517 9317.	Home - Sycamore Trust

Ask Sycamore Trust

Our Family Services team can help you think about which stories might help your child, and how to adapt them. Your child's school, speech and language therapist or local autism team may also help you create stories.

Thank you for reading

Sycamore Trust UK is a registered charity supporting autistic children, young people, adults and their families across Barking & Dagenham, Havering and Redbridge.

Call us	Visit us	Find us online
020 8517 9317	27–29 Woodward Road, Dagenham RM9 4SJ	Home - Sycamore Trust

Disclaimer

The stories in this booklet are **general examples** to help families and professionals support neurodivergent children and young people. They are not a substitute for advice from a speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, teacher, health professional or bereavement specialist. Every person is different, so please adapt each story to the individual and their situation.

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