SOCIAL SKILLS NAVIGATION PACK

A guide for families who have a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Compiled by the Autism Information Line
Autism Spectrum Australia
Who is Autism Spectrum Australia?
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) is the largest service provider for individuals with autism spectrum disorder\(^1\) (ASD) and their families in Australia.

What is the Autism Information Line?
Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect) recognises that there are many questions for individuals who have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), as well as for their families, carers, support staff and professionals. It is with the support of fundraising that Aspect operates the Autism Information Line (AIL).

The role of the AIL is to:
- Assist in answering specific enquiries
- Provide a referral point for services within Aspect and the wider community
- Offer brief practical advice to assist families and carers with their day to day management of children with ASD

The information line is staffed by Aspect professionals from a range of disciplines, who access a wide range of information regarding services and resources. Interpreters can be arranged for callers (please advise language required on initial call).

Please call the Autism Information Line

02 8977 8377
1800 069 978

Email infoline@autismspectrum.org.au

\(^1\) ASD includes autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disability – not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS) and Asperger’s disorder.
Introduction

This pack has been compiled by the Autism Information Line at Autism Spectrum Australia to assist parents and other family members to navigate the services available in NSW for families that have a school aged child with an Autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Contents

- What are social skills?
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Every care is taken to ensure that the information included in this Navigation Pack is correct but inaccuracies may nevertheless occur. If you discover any information which you believe to be inaccurate please contact Infoline@autismspectrum.org.au.

Services are included in the Navigation Pack to assist you. Their inclusion in the pack does not necessarily imply that Aspect endorses or supports them, nor does the absence of a service imply that Aspect does not support them. Aspect cannot be held responsible for any damage or loss caused by any inaccuracy in the Navigation Pack.
What are Social Skills?

We all use a variety of social skills every time we interact. By “social skills” we generally mean skills such as: conversational skills; play skills; understanding emotions; dealing with conflict; and friendship skills. The development of these skills in typically developing children starts early in life and happens over a number of years, generally without a lot of direct instruction. Most children learn social skills by watching their peers, experimenting in imitation and refining their skills as they go. Children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) do not seem to naturally develop social skills in the same way their peers do. Social skills and social situations need to be broken down, explained and practised so that children with an ASD can absorb them at a level that makes sense to them.

“It’s as if everybody is playing some complicated game and I am the only one who hasn’t been told the rules.” (Sainsbury, 2000,

Strategies for developing Social Skills

There are a number of different strategies that can help in the development of social skills. The following is a brief summary of more structured options but there are also many games and play ideas you can try at home. For more detail please refer to the references at the end of this pack.

In particular, “The Hidden Curriculum” by Brenda Smith Myles and the NAS information sheet on “Practical ideas for developing different social skills at home.”

- Social stories
- Comic strip conversations
- Social autopsies
- video modelling
- SOCCSS
- SOLVE
- Local Community groups

Social Stories. Social Stories were created by Carol Gray in 1995. A social story is a personalised story that describes a specific social situation from the child or young person’s perspective. The description may include where and why the situation occurs, how others feel or react, or what prompts their feelings and reactions.

For further reading see the attached Building Blocks Aspect’s Early Intervention service parent information sheet “Developing Social Skills and implementing social stories”

Comic strip conversations: Also developed by Carol Gray. Visual symbols such as those found in cartoons often enhance social understanding, turning abstract and elusive events into something tangible that a person can reflect upon. This can help with theory of mind, and to understand the intent behind others actions. In comic strip conversations stick figures with speech and thought bubbles are drawn to illustrate the story while the child is talking. Colours from a colour chart illustrate feelings e.g. green equals kind words and thoughts, and red equals mean words and thoughts.

Social autopsies: A social skills autopsy is a constructive problem-solving strategy designed to decrease the likelihood that similar social misunderstandings will reoccur. With the student as an active participant, this verbally based strategy typically begins with asking, “What happened?” The adult proceeds to ask clarifying questions and then the student is prompted to (a) identify the error,
(b) determine who is harmed by the error, (c) decide how to correct the error, and (d) develop a plan so the error does not happen again.

**Video Modelling:** In video modelling children and young people learn social skills by observing a videotape of themselves or others engaging in a task or completing an activity. The advantages of this approach is that it supports learning using the child's visual learning style, it is motivating and also proactive; allowing a child to examine a social situation before a problem occurs.

**Situation-Options-Consequences-Choices-Strategies-Simulation (SOCCS)** Jan Roosa developed the SOCCS strategy to help children understand social situations and develop problem solving skills by putting social and behavioural issues into a sequential form. This teacher directed strategy helps children understand cause and effect and realize that they can influence the outcome of many situations by the decisions they make.

**Seek-Observe-Listen-Vocalize-Educate (SOLVE)** This approach is a way of viewing the world that can be used in almost all environments and situations. Essentially it involves:

- seeking to understand all aspects of the hidden curriculum-always be on the look-out in every social situation.
- Observing what people are doing and not doing
- Listening to what people are saying and not saying
- Vocalise-ask questions, check for understanding
- Educate-teach and learn, if you see some-one else struggling, you may want to help them understand the hidden curriculum too.

**Local Community** Using your local community's resources is a great way to open your child's social networks. Look for any local interest clubs, chess clubs, sporting groups that your child might be interested in.

**Who can help?**

**Services from Autism Spectrum Australia (Aspect):**

**Aspect's Education Outreach** is a specialist autism intervention team that offers consultations to children with ASD in mainstream educational settings within Sydney and regional NSW, including group and individual social skills programs. For details call 1300 335 015

**Aspect's Social Clubs** for children aged 8-18 years. Social clubs meet throughout Sydney, Hunter, Central Coast and South Coast and offer children the opportunity to meet and make new friends and to interact in structured but relaxed, stimulating and fun recreational environments. For more details contact Jane Cotter on 8868 8504 or for registration forms contact Beth Del Rosario on 8868 8500 bdelrosario@autismspectrum.org.au

**Aspect's Early Intervention Service Building Blocks** offer social skills development as part of their early intervention programme for children aged under 6. For more information about Building Blocks call 02 8977 8341 or email buildingblocks@autismspectrum.org.au
Aspect’s Adult Asperger’s Social Club is for young adults who have asperger’s or similar communication or social needs. The group meets in Sydney every fortnight on Wednesdays from 7 to 9 pm. For the calendar of events and details of how to join see our website www.autismspectrum.org.au or contact the Co-ordinator, Caroline Smith on 0409 603 582.

Aspect’s Positive Partnerships: supporting school aged students on the autism spectrum has excellent information on their website, including subjects such as bullying and making friends. For more information call 1300 881 971 or visit www.autismtraining.com.au

Resources in the Sydney area

Northern Sydney:

- Sydney Child Psychology Centre provides direct instruction and small group social skills training for preschoolers through to young adults with ASD in Mosman. Information about their programs can be found at www.sydneychildpsychologist.com.au or call 9960 1222.
- Spectrum Education Consulting run social skills groups for children aged 2-9 years at Crows nest www.e-比利.com/spectrum Phone 9922 6952
- Sydney Child Development Centre offers social skills groups in Roseville www.communicationdevelopment.com.au Phone 9412 4343
- All Communication Matters offer social skills groups for children and adults in Hornsby and Erina. www.allcommunication.com.au Phone 9482 8099
- Kaleidoscope Network in Belrose offers social skills groups with an ABA focus. Phone 0417 063 689
- Lizard Children’s Centre in Chatswood offers social skills groups with an ABA focus. The program is also run as an outreach service in a number of private schools across Sydney www.lizardcentre.com Phone 9904 8130
- Quickstepz Paediatric Therapy offers social skills programs with a Relationship-based (DIR)/ Floortime model focus at St Leonards. Phone 9460 6552 or email info@quickstepz.com.au
- Jeroen Decates Psychologist at Wahroonga on 0402 028 588 www.jdpsy.org. Jeroen also runs a support group for adults with asperger’s on the North Shore.
- Julie Peterson Psychologist at Pymble offers social skills support. For details call 9988 0760 www.otherhalf.com.au
- Kidslink on the North Shore offer social skills groups for school aged children during the school term and holiday workshops. For details call Leonie Reisberg on 0414 452 177 www.kidslink.com.au

North West Sydney:

- Skills for Kids in Blaxland run and playground and skills camps during the school holidays www.skillsforkids.com.au Phone 4739 0267.
- Accent (Konfident Kids) offer social skills groups in the school setting in term time and holidays www.konfidentkids.com.au
- Diane Avery Speech pathology in Kellyville. Language, literacy and social skills groups. Call 9836 2936
- Education Spotlight Blacktown. Provide social skills groups. Call Aaron on 0410 495 409 or Louise on 0400 328 503
- T.A.G (Teen Autism and Aspergers group) presented by the Autism and Aspergers group on 0425 380 575 has monthly meetings with social outings etc. Attendees must be members of AASG. Contact them on www.autismsupport.org.au or info@autismsupport.org.au
• Peckys peer support social group for children with a mild to moderate intellectual disability in Seven Hills. Meet on Saturdays 10.30-4pm. Call Jodie on 96883268

Sydney based:

• TAFE Social and Occupational Communication Skills (SOCCS) for young adults with asperger's. This program offers young people aged 16 and over the opportunity to practise and develop social and communication skills using video, role play and scripts. The course is two days a week Feb to June at Meadowbank TAFE or July to December at Hornsby College. For details call Simon Piggott on 9448 4431 or 0434 322 451 or email Simon.Piggott@tafensw.edu.au
• Liz Dore offers friendship and relationship workshops for children over 10 years and young adults in Burwood and Chatswood. For details call Liz Dore on 0416 122 634 or email liz@relationshipsandprivatestuff.com www.relationshipsandprivatestuff.com
• Lifesart run a variety of social skills groups throughout Sydney www.lifestart.org.au Phone 9807 9700
• Learning Links offer social skills groups throughout Sydney. For details www.learninglinks.org.au Phone 8568 8200.
• Peers support offer social skills workshops throughout Australia. For details call 9905 3499 www.peersupport.edu.au
• Aspire offer social skills groups for children aged between 7 and 10 at Wentworth point in the Inner West. Thursday afternoons at 4pm. For details contact info@aspireearlyintervention.com or call 02 9739 9798.

Sydney Metro

• Janina Szyndler Psychologist at Burwood offers social skills support. Phone 9715 5534 or 0403 959 211 www.apexpsychology.com.au
• AS-Teen is a social club for young people aged 13-18 with asperger’s in the Sydney Metro area. (Affiliated to Aspect from March 2010) The group also provides an email yahoo group for teens to keep in touch with each other. For details contact Christine Ayo at christineayo@optusnet.com.au or call 0413 781 626
• Capable Kids by the University of NSW Psychology Clinic in Kensington offer a 12 week social skills group and also individual sessions for children. For details call 9385 3042.
• Support group for adults with asperger’s at Burwood, meets 2nd Saturday every month. Contact Eleanor Gittins on 0408 954 358 or email janetgittins@hotmail.com
• Macquarie University runs Social Skills courses for year 3-6. They are 10 week courses and include parenting programs.Call Caroline Stevenson on 9869 4112/0411 028 664

Western Sydney:

• John Blythe Psychologist at Blacktown offers social skills support. Phone 9622 9610 info@childpsychology.net.au
• Renee Ferris Psychologist at Penrith. Phone 4731 6516
• Ability Options at Seven Hills offers both a social and an active youth programme for adults with a disability. For details phone Kim Silverman on 8811 1723 or email cherie.cordina@abilityoptions.org.au
• Barnardo’s offers social groups for young people aged between 13 and 24 with a disability in the Penrith/Cranebrook area. Trish Hurley 4729 1211.
• Hills Family Centre at Castle Hill organises social skills groups for 6-12 year olds. To find
out about their current courses call 9899 2944.

South East Sydney:

- Aspire run social skills groups with an ABA focus for younger children in Kings Langley. [www.aspireearlyintervention.com](http://www.aspireearlyintervention.com)
- Spot 4 Kids in Bondi Junction runs social skills groups for children in a group holiday program. Phone 0417 229 878
- Annie's Centre in Randwick offers social skills groups [www.anniescentre.com](http://www.anniescentre.com)
- Kick-start Kid's Therapy in Clovelly run social skills groups. Phone: 9326 6433
- Kid's Focus Paediatrics in Oatley run social skills groups. Phone 9570 3322
- Sylvanvale in Kirrawee run social skills groups and teen time after school and vacation care [www.sylvanvalefoundation.com.au](http://www.sylvanvalefoundation.com.au)
- Sydney Paediatrics in Woollahra runs social skills groups. Phone 9328 7344
- Capable Kids in Engadine offer a social skills group. Phone 9520 3388 [www.capablekids.net.au](http://www.capablekids.net.au)
- Lucette Van Someren Boyd a Special Educator in Monterey offers social skills groups. Phone 9553 4971.
- St George River also has social groups for children with autism and their siblings.

South West Sydney

- The Autism advisory and Support Service (AASS) has started a new social group for young adults with ASD in Liverpool. The group offers the opportunity for young people with ASD to meet socially once a month at AASS house in Liverpool. For more details call Leah Bradley on 0428 205591 or 9601 2844 or email info@aass.org.au
  AASS with the services of an Occupational and Speech therapist also run social skills groups for 7-12 year olds
- Leisure Link in Liverpool, Fairfield and Bankstown offers leisure activities to children aged 12-18 with a disability on Saturdays once a fortnight. They also offer camps and school holiday programmes. For details call Elizabeth Capela on 9821 2811 or email Elizabeth.capela@disabilitysouthwest.org.au

Resources in regional NSW

Newcastle/Hunter/Central Coast

- Strengthening Families offer a social group movie club for children with asperger’s aged 13-16. The next group is planned for term 2 2010. For details contact Mia Christenson on 4921 8723. strengthening-families@newcastle.edu.au
- Newcastle Autism Support Group has teen and adult social groups. For details call Leigh Michel on 4966 1717.
• All Communication Matters, Erina Fair Medical Centre ‘The Hive’ Erina Fair’ Provides Autism/Dyspraxia social skill groups for non verbal children. Call 9482 8099
• Educare, Charlestown. Call 4943 4444. website www.educare.net.au
• Recovery Station, Toronto. SPOT groups, fine motor, language, social skills. Call 4959 2211

Central West:

• Orange and District Early Education Programme (ODEEP) run social skills groups Phone 02 6361 4093 email: odeep@nsw.chariot.net.au
• Speech Pathology Dubbo Community Health offers social skills support for school aged children. Phone 6885 8999.
• Jumpstart Therapy. Phone 02 4782 5534. Katoomba, Blaxland and Penrith.

Riverina Murray:

• Kurrajong Early Intervention Service offer social skills groups in Wagga www.Kurrajongwaratah.org.au/KurrajongEarlyInterventionService.aspx
• Interact Speech Pathology. Albury. Group Intervention and Social Skill groups. Call 6021 4269

South Coast:

• Support group for adults with aspergers in the Nowra area. Meets the last Saturday of every month. Contact Eleanor Gittins on 0408 954 358 or email janetgittins@hotmail.com
• Social group for adults with aspergers in Wollongong. Meets the first Wednesday of every month. Contact Samantha at asd.support@hotmail.com
• Social Support Group. Parent group to chat about ups and downs of parenting teens in the Belconnen area (Queanbeyan could access this). Please call Lucy on 6278 8108

Health Professional websites

• Australian Association of Occupational Therapists www.ausot.com.au Search their online database to find an OT in your area.
• Australian Psychological Society www.psychology.org.au Search their online database to find a psychologist in your area
• Speech Pathology Australia www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au Search their online database to find a speech pathologist in your area.

Resources to assist social skills development

Structured Programmes

If you’d like to find out more about developing social skills then there are a number of further books and resources that you will find helpful.
If you feel that you would like to take a more structured approach in teaching your child social skills, there are many commercially available programmes that you could work through with your child. Before embarking on a formal programme it is often worth getting some professional input to help guide you to resources that are most appropriate for your child.

The main thing to keep in mind when helping your young child with an ASD to improve their social skills is practise!

**Mind reading:** *The Interactive Guide to Emotions* Cambridge University Autism Research Centre. Based on research conducted by Cambridge University it addresses the issue of recognising and understanding over 400 emotions. It puts emotions in context, provides an opportunity to see and hear different emotions, and has lessons, games and a quizzes section. It comes as a DVD or a CD-ROM.

**The Cat Kit: Cognitive affective training** by Annette Moller Nielsen, Kirsten Callesen and Tony Attwood. Developed to facilitate conversations about thoughts and feelings and to help children gain better insight into social relationships.

**Teaching Children with Autism to Mind-read: A Practical Guide** by Patricia Howlin, Simon Baron-Cohen and Julie Hadwin. Addresses issues specifically around “theory of mind” in relation to social skills. Looks at interpreting facial expressions, recognising feelings, seeing things from another person's perspective and understanding their beliefs and knowledge.


**The Incredible 5-point Scale: assisting children with ASD's in understanding social interactions and controlling their emotions** by Kari Dunn Baron and Mitzi Curtis. This clearly written book shows children how to work at problem behaviour, such as obsessions or yelling and move on to alternative positive behaviours.

**A 5 is against the law! Social boundaries: straight up! An honest guide for teens and young adults** by Kari Dunn Buron


**Social skills training for children and adolescents with asperger syndrome and social-communication problems** by Jed.E.Baker. Covers lots of skill areas such as conversation, play skills, empathy and conflict resolution. Also *The autism social skills picture book* by the same author.

**Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond** by Jed Baker.


**Asperger's...What does it mean to me? A workbook explaining self awareness and life lessons to the child or youth with HFA or asperger's** by Catherine Faherty.

**Space Travellers: an interactive program for developing social understanding, social competence and social skills for students with Asperger's syndrome, autism and other social cognitive challenges** by MA Carter and j Santomauro. Bases learning social skills on working through a “space program”, fun and great for children with a special interest in space and science.
Children and Youth with Asperger Syndrome by B Smith Myles

Super skills by J Coucouvanis

Revealing the Hidden Social Code- Social Stories for people with ASD by Howley and Arnold

Survival Strategies for People on the Autism Spectrum by Marc Fleisher. A self help guide for teenagers and adults written by an adult with Asperger's.

Asperger Syndrome: a guide for parents and professionals by Tony Attwood. This book has good chapters on social understanding and friendship, and teasing and bullying. and there is a useful list of resources in the appendix. The author also has an excellent website at www.tonyattwood.com.au which is full of interesting advice and papers.

Socialeyes by the National Autistic Society (UK) is primarily suitable for people with asperger syndrome Socialeyes does not ask people on the autism spectrum to change 'inappropriate' social behaviour, or to acquire social skills by copying the 'typical' behaviour of others. Instead, it gives people the option of learning social interaction skills or alternative social strategies. Socialeyes focuses on eight social skills that people on the autism spectrum can have difficulty with, including starting a conversation, eye contact and personal space. Available from www.nas.org.uk online shop.


The Way to A Program by Hunter Manasco has good visuals and step by step information

Resilient Kids Primary Program by Campbell, Kearney, Gleeson and Dale- suitable for pre-k1 easy activities for building social skills.

Video Modelling Resources

Manners in the Real World www.coultervideo.com

Model me kids www.modelmekids.com

Games

Positive Pragmatic Game Boards by Super Duper available from www.acer.edu.au

Socially Speaking Game by LDA available from www.acer.edu.au

Speaking and Listening Board Games by Smart Kids www.smartkids.com.au

Social Skills Board Games by Smart Kids www.smartkids.com.au

Internet resources and web programs

Whiz Kid Games a free online therapeutic games portal specifically designed for children with ASD. www.autismgames.com.au

Secret Agent Society Programme by the Social Skills Training Institute. Uses games and activities to improve the emotional and social skills of children with ASD aged 8-13 www.sst-institute.net
The Transporters a DVD set to help young children recognise emotions. Developed with the autism research centre at Cambridge University www.thetransporters.com

The website www.nas.org.uk has a number of useful information sheets on the subject of social skills including Practical ideas for developing social skills at home and Making Friends

The website www.thegraycenter.org has information on social stories

The website www.dotolearn.com/games/facialexpressions has a free online game about facial expressions

Reach Out Central www.reachoutcentral.com.au is an online role-playing game designed to help students to learn and improve skills for life such as communication, problem solving and optimistic thinking in a virtual setting using real life scenarios. Students take on the role of a character that is new in town. It is up to them to work out how to settle in, make new friends and find their way around the place.

The website www.speakingofspeech.com has free downloads of social speech skills

The website www.kindergarten.com has iphone applications to assist with social skills

The Australian Council for Education Research (www.acer.edu.au) publish and distribute a wide range of autism specific books and other materials.
BUILDING BLOCKS® Early Intervention Service
Parent Information Sheet

Developing Social Skills
and Implementing Social Stories

It is a common misconception that all individuals with autism spectrum disorders are withdrawn, lacking emotion and empathy, or want to avoid social situations. On the contrary, many children feel quite intense emotions and would like to socialise but they do not understand how to express feelings or manage and understand different social situations.

According to Janzen (1996), there are a number of factors closely associated with social deficits in children with autism including:

- An inability to understand the perspective of others and how one’s own perspective impacts on others,
- An inability to identify and make sense of social information generated through facial expression, gestures, language nuances, etc.,
- An inability to formulate appropriate responses in varied and ever-changing social situations,
- An inability to show social judgement.

The effects of these deficits have a huge impact on how a child relates to other people and are usually seen in the following:

- Inflexibility because social rules are learned in a rigid way, with little understanding that there may be a range of acceptable behaviour. If told what to do the child will do it the same way exactly, with no variation. This inflexibility makes it difficult to adapt to changes and to interact socially.
- No understanding of what is acceptable behaviour privately and publicly. Without an understanding of the perspective of others, children with autism do not feel embarrassment or automatically learn social and cultural rules and taboos.
- Poor organisation and management skills especially in unstructured situations such as free time, breaks, weekends, parties and holiday time.

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• Difficulty initiating interactions, entering ongoing interactions or engaging in social conversations. There seems an inability to read the subtle body language or social cues in others such as boredom or embarrassment or to understand a desire to change the subject or end a conversation.

• Lack of focus on what is relevant information in a group activity in order to be able to share common experiences.

• Misunderstanding of social overtures, humour and jokes.

Even the most capable individuals with autism have difficulty expressing and interpreting the range of emotion and social and cultural rules that are normally acquired automatically. “Their natural innocence, honesty, guilelessness, and their lack of social judgement make them vulnerable to exploitation. They are often misunderstood and easily hurt when they are corrected or teased.” (Janzen, 1996, p.45)

Teaching Social Skills

• Social skills should be taught and practised simultaneously in both structured and natural settings,

• The most effective reinforcers are those rewards that occur naturally,

• It is important to incorporate structure and routine into teaching techniques,

• It is important not to make any unexpected changes to routines unless these can be fully explained, and the child prepared, ahead of time,

• Introduce some visual supports such as gestures, pictures or cue cards to augment any instructions and ensure that all staff members are consistent in using the correct supports,

• Always pair the non-verbal cues (visual supports) with verbal cues where possible,

• Any targeted social skill should be regularly practiced and generalised so that it becomes part of children’s normal routine and they feel comfortable and use the skill in different situations.

Social Stories

“Social stories are short stories that describe social situations in terms of relevant social cues and often define appropriate responses”. Carol Gray (1993)

Social stories describe certain situations and then suggest appropriate responses. Social stories present social information as clearly as possible while minimising teacher-student interactions involved in traditional teaching methods.

They are written in response to the needs of children and may be identified through:

• Recognition that certain situations may be difficult for a particular child,

• A child’s responses to questions about social situations that indicate that the child is misreading a particular situation,
• Social skills assessments and curricula

Based on the identified needs, social stories may:

• Describe any situation in terms of the relevant social cues and correct responses in a non-threatening format,
• Personalise or emphasise social skills covered in any social skills training program,
• Translate goals into understandable steps,
• Explain the fictional qualities of stories, movies and help to identify realistically appropriate from inappropriate interactions depicted in those stories,
• Teach routines, as well as help children to accommodate changes in routines,
• Teach academic material in a realistic way that assists children to relate learned material to real situations,
• Other possibilities, limited only by creativity.

Children, parents or professionals can write social stories. Social stories are effective for children functioning within a wide range of abilities as reading ability is not necessary for social stories to be used successfully. Social stories may be presented pictorially or be recorded on audiocassette for non-readers.

Writing Social Stories

“Each social story describes a situation, skill or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives and common responses”. (Carol Gray, 2000)

Social stories are written from the child’s viewpoint. The writer should write in the first person (“I”, “me”) and describe what the child may see, hear and feel. They should be written well within a child’s comprehension level, using vocabulary and print size appropriate for his or her ability.

Social stories have an introduction, body and conclusion and also answer “wh” questions such as “who”, “what”, “where”, “why” and “when”.

E.g. “My teacher is taking me to the library tomorrow to borrow a book about trains”.

Social stories use positive language and state desired responses positively. If a reference to a negative behaviour is essential to the story, it should be mentioned carefully and in general terms as in “sometimes children scream when they are angry….”

Social stories may contain different types of short sentences: descriptive, perspective, affirmative and directive sentences with each serving a specific purpose.

Descriptive sentences: indicate what people do in a given situation, and why. Social stories often begin with a descriptive sentence to set the scene. They may describe a setting; an activity and/or the people involved and are accurate, assumption free statements of fact.

“My name is Joe. I go to Summer Hill Public School”.

Directive sentences: are individualised statements of desired responses. The sentences provide a sequential list of expected responses to the targeted situation and focus on what a child should
do to be successful in a given situation. Directive sentences should be positive statements.
“I will walk to my classroom when the bell rings. I will line up outside the classroom. I will stand quietly and wait for my teacher”.

**Perspective sentences:** describe other people’s reactions or responses to a situation as well as their thoughts and feelings.
“My teacher is happy when I put my hand up to ask a question. She will smile at me.”

**Affirmative sentences:** enhance the meaning of surrounding statements and may share a commonly shared opinion.
“Children should walk in the playground so they do not fall over. Most children walk to class when the bell rings”.

Social stories should be literally accurate, mentioning possible changes in routine and using general terms such as “usually” and “sometimes”.

Social stories may contain alternative vocabulary to avoid any possibility of anxiety. For example “different” may be written as “another”.
“I am in first grade. Usually, Mrs Jones is my teacher … If Mrs Jones is sick, I may have another (different) teacher. This is OK.”

Social stories use concrete, easy to understand text enhanced by visual supports such as pictures, photographs, maps, symbols, etc.

Social stories use text and illustrations that reflect an understanding of children’s personal learning characteristics including their cognitive ability, reading skills and attention span.

Social stories use a title that states the main idea or overall goal of the story, reinforcing the most important information.

**Instructional Strategies**

- Select a quiet and calm place to introduce a Social Story to a particular child,
- For young children, sit at the child’s side and slightly back,
- Introduce the story with a simple, straightforward approach,
- Read the story out loud. Have the child read the story if they are able to read,
- Generalise the story by having other people read the story to the child,
- Practice what the story says,
- If the story is written at school, encourage the child to take the story home and read the story to parents (or have them read the story to the child),
- Review the story at appropriate times as a reminder to the child,
- You may fade the story if you feel it is appropriate or keep the story in a special book for the child. Encourage the child to occasionally review earlier social stories.

The following are examples of social stories that have been written for young children. They may be of assistance to you when you are developing social stories to help your child in particular situations.

**Remember:** All stories should be individualised for a particular child, and augmented with appropriate visual supports.