

Social Stories: A User-Friendly Intervention?

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Abstract. Social Stories are a popular intervention used to address the social impairments of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). Parents and teachers wrote two Social Stories, the first after reading a shortened version of widely available information about Social Stories and the second after instruction and guided practice. Results address how much training is needed in the composition prior to writing Social Stories.

1. Introduction (Describe your idea)

Social Stores wee developed by Carol Gray to teach social skills about a particular event and provided information about the expected or appropriate response within those conditions. They are a popular intervention used to address the social impairments of children with ASDs. The purpose of this study was to evaluate whether parents and educational professionals could, after reviewing shortened versions of Gray’s materials about social story rationale and composition, correctly author their own Social Stories according to Gray’s guidelines.

Social Stories should be understood easily by the child with an ASD and include vocabulary and presentation forms that are appropriate for the individual’s age, abilities, and comprehension level. The shortened versions of Gray’s materials included five sentence types and emphasized a specific ratio of various sentence types within the story in order that the social story describes the situation rather that only directs the expected behavior of the child.

The lives of family members can be substantially improved when the behaviors that disrupt regular routines are reduced. Social stories can be individualized to cater to the individual needs of the student and the individual situations. They are usually developed by those who know the child well (e.g., parents and teachers). Extant research in which parents have implemented social stories have employed stories authored by the researchers. There have not been studies, to date, in which parents have authored and implemented social stories with their children with ASDs.

There is a misconception that social stories are easily written. Depending on the needs of the individual with an ASD, the situation or event, and the individual authoring the story, the process may be time-consuming, requiring a lot of information gathering and rewriting. The Gray Center, which Carol Gray founded, offers materials about how to write Social Stories.

2. Experiment, Results, Discussion, and Significance (Describe how you developed your idea)

This study assisted in determining that social stories were not correctly written after the use of shortened versions of Gray’s materials and that more training is required. A convenience sample of 15 females comprised of parents who have children with ASDs and educators with current or recent experience with a child with an ASD, but without any formal training in Social Stories, participated in the study. Each individual completed the following activities solely or individually with a small group during a single 2-3 hours session.

Research participants read a condensed version of *Social Stories 10.0: The New Defining Criteria & Guidelines* (Gray, 2004) listing nine criteria for elements of correctly written Social Stories; read the profile of a fictional child with an ASD, “Zac”; and then wrote a Social Story to help Zac with his chore of feeding and watering the pets. This first phase was intended to simulate the experience of parents and educators who read about Social Stories and then write Social Stories for their children or students.

Next participants received additional instruction in writing social stories. The researcher gave a 30-minute power point presentation based on *Social Stories 10.0* that emphasized the basic Social Story writing elements and included more detail than the condensed version that participants read in the first phase of the research. This presentation provided opportunities for discussion and guided practice. Interactions between the researcher and participants were recorded with notes, audio tape, or both for later review.

Finally, participants read a second profile of a child with an ASD, “Jon”, and wrote a Social Story to help Jon complete his morning routine. The profiles of ac and Jon were of similar lengths and readability levels. This final phase represents the experience of individuals who have received more extensive and individualized instruction in writing Social Stories.

Both of each participant’s Social Stories, for Zac and for Jon, were scored on 23 criteria based on elements of correctly written Social Stories. Interrater reliability of the scoring protocol was established based on stories written by 27 subjects prior to this research.

The basic research question of how much instruction parents and educators need to attain competence in writing Social Stories was addressed by the statistical comparison of participants’ scores on the criteria for their stories for Zac and Jon. This research showed that training is required over independent reading and self-instruction based on interpreting the literature oneself.

3. Conclusions

Participant’s stories improved after training occurred; there were several areas of composition that showed significant improvements. Participants reported the second story was easier to write after training, compared to their first attempt. Participant’s stories showed significantly more difficulty with writing correct sentence types than other story components. The quality of sentences improved after training with the stories moving closer to the preferred sentence ratio.

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