

# Teacher Toolbox



## Teacher Toolbox – December 2024

By Margaret Wood, Speech-Language Pathologist and TAP Consultant [mwood@ces.org](mailto:mwood@ces.org)

### **Changes Ahead!**

*DIY Social Narratives: Decrease anxiety & Increase calm*



As previously discussed, routine and consistency are key for many students, especially those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). However, a natural breakdown of routine and structure occurs during the holiday season – in all settings, including school and home environments. Educators and parents are often left with a mixture of dread and excitement during this time of year, as school days are frequently filled with - both planned and unplanned - holiday projects, performances, and parties, which may increase anxiety for students who thrive on following the same routine. Let's ponder the following important question:

### **Question:**

***How do we prepare our students for all these changes, while still enjoying the festivities and school breaks?***

### **Answer:**

***Create a Social Narrative!***

Let's delve more deeply into the **Social Narrative** tool, which is one of the evidence-based practices that I briefly described in last month's Teacher Toolbox article (and throughout several previous **Autism Toolbox** TAP workshops in greater detail – read to the end for more information and web links). Research has repeatedly indicated that when individuals with ASD are given the opportunity to learn with visual supports or cues, they learn more rapidly, complete tasks more independently, demonstrate decreased levels of frustration, anxiety and aggression, and adjust more readily to changes in their environments. One type of visual support is a social narrative, which describes social situations for many types of learners, including those with ASD, by providing:

- relevant cues
- explanation of the feelings and thoughts of others in the social situation
- descriptions of appropriate behavior expectations

A social narrative is not complicated or confusing. It is simply a short story with pictures and simple text, which helps a student understand and prepare for a particular social situation.

Social narratives may be created using a variety of formats (i.e., Social Stories, Power Cards, Cartooning, Comic Strip Conversations, etc.) and are designed to familiarize your student with who and what to expect during an unfamiliar or infrequently occurring activity (e.g., school assemblies/performances, snow days, and the upcoming winter break). In 1991, Carol Gray created one type of social narrative, called Social Stories. Carol Gray stated, "The goal of a Social Story is to share accurate social information, in a patient and reassuring manner, that is easily understood by its audience." Power cards (Elisa Gagnon, 2001) are a visual priming strategy that uses a child's special interest/character/hero (e.g., Spiderman or Bluey) to help make sense of social situations, routines, the meaning of language and the unwritten social rules. Cartooning and comic strip conversations are also useful types of social narratives that are typically engaging for a developmentally older audience. These formats provide picture and text illustrations of words that are actually said in a conversation, how people might be feeling, and what people's intentions might be. Choose a format that best suits your student's needs.

**PowerPoint Slide from ASD Toolbox Series: Social Narratives Webinar by Margaret Wood**

## Teaching Expectations through *Social Stories*

*The story should answer the who, what, when, where, and why about a particular situation or the expected behavior you are trying to elicit from the student.*

		
Alternative way to teach routines, expectations, and behavioral standards	Reinforces correct behavior	Information presented in a story format
		
Visual examples of expected behavior	Personalized behavioral intervention	Involves students in the learning process

### ***7 Simple Social Story DIY Steps!***

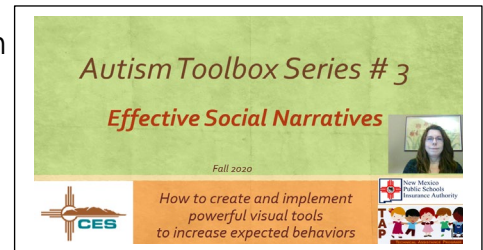
1. Using any word processing software you prefer (e.g., Microsoft Word), type a simple story in first person (from the student's perspective) in the present tense, using simple and positive language that the student will understand.
2. Identify the target behavior, skill, or event in the title. Focus on one skill, behavior, or event at a time and break down the event/task into simple steps by providing three types of statements: ***descriptive, directive, and perspective***.
3. Answer who, what, when, where, and why questions about the event/task (***descriptive statements***).
4. Clearly state the desired behaviors by explicitly stating what the student is expected to say and do in that situation (***directive statements***). Provide 2-3 descriptive sentences for every directive.

5. Explain the likely associated feelings of the student and others (*perspective statements*).
6. Use pictures to support the text, regardless of the developmental age of your student to increase understanding and recall (e.g., Google images and/or [www.iconfinder.com](http://www.iconfinder.com) for free images to copy/paste into the story).
7. Be sure to save your story as a computer file with student initials for future editing, as needed. Print and laminate or place in a plastic sheet protector. For those students who may need multiple Social Stories, consider compiling them in a binder for future reference.

**Simple (IMPORTANT) Steps for Social Story Success:**

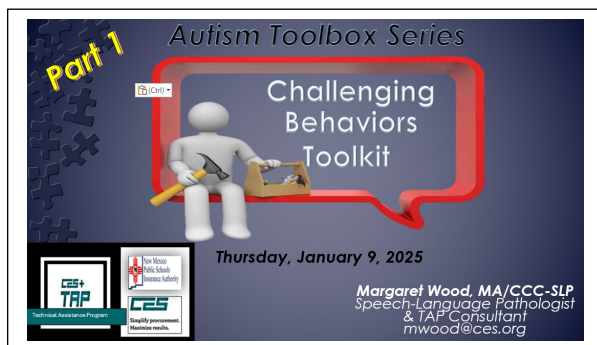
- Read through the story with your student and have them read the story to themselves (if possible) when the student is in a calm, "ready to learn" state.
- The social story should be read often and before the situation is expected to occur.
- As your student begins to apply the expected skills, the story can be read less frequently.
- Discuss personal experiences regarding the story to make connections to their real life.
- After reading the story several times, role-play the scenario and the expected behaviors.
- When the child exhibits the expected behaviors, provide genuine positive feedback.
- Be sure to keep the social story near the student so they can have access to it as needed.

Social narratives are a fast and effective tool that is well-worth your time and energy. Keep calm and enjoy Winter Break! If you would like additional details about today's topic, watch the Autism Toolbox Series: Social Narratives webinar, which can be found here: [www.cesap.org](http://www.cesap.org).



**Check out the following resource websites for excellent examples of Social Narratives!**

- <https://www.andnextcomesl.com/2019/11/christmas-social-stories.html>
- <https://autismclassroomresources.com/free-interactive-social-narrative-for/>
- [https://ocali.org/resource\\_gallery\\_of\\_interventions/Power-Cards](https://ocali.org/resource_gallery_of_interventions/Power-Cards)
- <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Christmas-Social-Story-FREEBIE-2-Differentiated-Stories-5096151>



**Be sure to register for the next complimentary  
AUTISM TOOLBOX SERIES TOPIC:  
Challenging Behaviors Part 1 (on 1/9/25) &  
Challenging Behaviors Part 2 (on 1/23/25)  
Go to <https://www.ces.org/> to register!**