Module: Social Narratives

Evidence-Based Practice Brief: Social Narratives

This evidence-based practice brief on social narratives includes the following components:

1. **Overview, which gives a quick summary of salient features of the practice, including what it is, who it can be used with, what skills it has been used with, settings for instruction, and additional literature documenting its use in practice**
2. **Steps for Implementation, detailing how to implement the practice in a practitioner-friendly, step-by-step process**
3. **Implementation Checklist, to be used to monitor fidelity of the use of the practice**
4. **Evidence Base Summary, which details the NPDC-ASD criteria for inclusion as an evidence-based practice and the specific studies that meet the criteria for this practice**

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Overview of Social Narratives

Collet-Klingenberg, L., & Franzone, E. (2008). *Overview of social narratives.* Madison, WI: The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, Waisman Center, University of Wisconsin.

Social narratives are interventions that describe social situations in some detail by highlighting relevant cues and offering examples of appropriate responding. They are aimed at helping learners adjust to changes in routine and adapt their behaviors based on the social and physical cues of a situation, or to teach specific social skills or behaviors. Social narratives are individualized according to learner needs and typically are quite short, perhaps including pictures or other visual aides. Sentence types that are often used when constructing social narratives include descriptive, directive, perspective, affirmative, control, and cooperative. Refer to the work of Gray (1993; 1995) for specific instructions on creating effective social stories (see Additional References below).

Evidence Base

Five single subject studies make up the evidence base for the practice of social narratives.

With what ages are social narratives effective?

The evidence-based research suggests that social narratives can be used effectively with learners with ASD. In the evidence base, children and youth ranging in age from early childhood to middle school who were identified as having ASD, autism, PDD-NOS, and Asperger's served as participants.

What skills or intervention goals can be addressed by social narratives?

Social narratives originated in the behavioral literature and have been used to (1) address behavioral difficulties, (2) teach social skills, and (3) promote effective and appropriate communication. In the evidence base, studies targeted the following skills or behaviors: repetitive behavior, social interactions, disruptive behavior, generalization of independent behavior, expression of frustration, choice-making and play, and on-task behavior.

In what settings have social narratives been effectively used?

Social narratives are designed to be used as a pre-cursor to, or in anticipation of, upcoming events. As such, they are portable and adaptable to nearly any setting. In the evidence base, the majority of the studies were conducted in school settings (including classrooms, therapy rooms, bathrooms, lunchrooms, and hallways). One study was conducted in a home setting while another study implemented a social narrative intervention in both school and community settings.

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Evidence Base

The studies cited in this section document that this practice meets the NPDC on ASD's criteria for an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

Preschool

Crozier, S., & Tincani, M. J. (2005). Using a modified social story to decrease disruptive behavior of a child with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 20*(3), 150-157.

Soenksen, D., & Alper, S. (2006). Teaching a young child to appropriately gain attention of peers using a social story intervention. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21*(6), 36-44.

Elementary and Middle School

Hagiwara, T., & Myles, B. S. (1999). A multimedia social story intervention: Teaching skills to children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 14*(2), 82-96.

Ivey, M. L, Heflin, L. J., & Alberto, P. (2004). The use of social stories to promote independent behaviors in novel events for children with PDD-NOS. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(3), 164-176.

Kuttler, S., & Myles, B. S. (1998). The use of social stories to reduce precursors to tantrum behavior in a student with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 13*(3), 176-183.

Selected Additional References

Agosta, E., Graetz, J. E., Mastropieri, M., & Scruggs, T. E. (2004). Teacher-researcher partnerships to improve social behavior through social stories. *Intervention in School & Clinic, 39*(5), 276-287.

Barry, L. M., & Burlew, S. B. (2004). Using social stories to teach choice and play skills to children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(1), 45-51.

Crozier, S., & Tincani, M. S. (2007). Effects of social stories on prosocial behavior of preschool children with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism & Developmental Disorders*, *37*(9), 1803-1814.

Delano, M., & Snell, M. (2006). The effects of social stories on the social engagement of children with autism. *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions, 8*(1), 29-42.

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Gray, C. (1995). Teaching children with autism to "read" social situations. In K. Quill (Ed.), *Teaching Children with Autism: Strategies to Enhance Communication and Socialization* (pp. 219-241). Albany, NY: Delmar.

Gray, C. A., & Garand, J.D. (1993). Social stories: Improving responses of students with autism with accurate social information. *Focus on Autistic Behavior, 8*, 1-10.

Kuoch, H., & Mirenda, P. (2003). Social story interventions for young children with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 18*(4), 219-227.

Reynhout, G., & Carter, M. (2007). Social Story efficacy with a child with autism spectrum disorder and moderate intellectual disability. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 22*(3), 173-182.

Scattone, D., Tingstrom, D. H., & Wilczynski, S. M. (2006). Increasing appropriate social interactions of children with autism spectrum disorders using social stories. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21*(4), 211-222.

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Evidence Base for Social Narratives

The National Professional Development Center on ASD has adopted the following definition of evidence-based practices.

To be considered an evidence-based practice for individuals with ASD, efficacy must be established through peer-reviewed research in scientific journals using:

- *randomized or quasi-experimental design studies.* Two high quality experimental or quasi-experimental group design studies,
- *single-subject design studies.* Three different investigators or research groups must have conducted five high quality single subject design studies, or
- *combination of evidence.* One high quality randomized or quasi-experimental group design study and three high quality single subject design studies conducted by at least three different investigators or research groups (across the group and single subject design studies).

High quality randomized or quasi experimental design studies do not have critical design flaws that create confounds to the studies, and design features allow readers/consumers to rule out competing hypotheses for study findings. High quality in single subject design studies is reflected by a) the absence of critical design flaws that create confounds and b) the demonstration of experimental control at least three times in each study.

This definition and criteria are based on the following sources:

Horner, R., Carr, E., Halle, J., McGee, G., Odom, S., & Wolery, M. (2005). The use of single subject research to identify evidence-based practice in special education. *Exceptional Children, 71,* 165-180.

Nathan, P., & Gorman, J. M. (2002). *A guide to treatments that work.* NY: Oxford University Press.

Odom, S. L., Brantlinger, E., Gersten, R., Horner, R. D., Thompson, B., & Harris, K. (2004). *Quality indicators for research in special education and guidelines for evidence-based practices: Executive summary.* Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children Division for Research.

Rogers, S. J., & Vismara, L. A. (2008). Evidence based comprehensive treatments for early autism. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 37*(1), 8-38.

Using these criteria, the empirical studies referenced below provide documentation for supporting social narratives as an evidence-based practice. This list is not exhaustive; other quality studies may exist that were not included.

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Preschool

Crozier, S., & Tincani, M. J. (2005). Using a modified social story to decrease disruptive behavior of a child with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 20*(3), 150-157.

Soenksen, D., & Alper, S. (2006). Teaching a young child to appropriately gain attention of peers using a social story intervention. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 21*(6), 36-44.

Elementary and Middle School

Hagiwara, T., & Myles, B. S. (1999). A multimedia social story intervention: Teaching skills to children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 14*(2), 82-96.

Ivey, M. L., Heflin, L. J., & Alberto, P. (2004). The use of social stories to promote independent behaviors in novel events for children with PDD-NOS. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 19*(3), 164-176.

Kuttler, S., & Myles, B. S. (1998). The use of social stories to reduce precursors to tantrum behavior in a student with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities, 13*(3), 176-183.

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Steps for Implementation: Social Narratives

These steps for implementation were adapted from:

Wragge, A. (2008). *Social narratives: Online training module.* (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska
Department of Education). In Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI), A*utism
Internet Modules,* www.autisminternetmodules.org. Columbus, OH: OCALI.

When planning for and implementing social narratives with children and youth with ASD, the
following steps are recommended.

Step 1. Identifying the Social Situation for the Intervention

1. Teachers/practitioners refer to IEP or IFSP for learner's goals.

2. Teachers/practitioners discuss goals with IFSP/IEP team members, including family and
    learner.

3. Teachers/practitioners select a social behavior for change, preferably one that will result in
    positive social interactions, a safer environment, additional social learning opportunities, or
    all three.

The first step in creating a social narrative is for teachers/practitioners to select a social behavior for
change. Additional information from the learner, his/her family, and/or educational team may be
helpful in identifying a target for change as well.

Step 2. Defining the Target Behavior or Skill

1. Teachers/practitioners clearly define the target behavior or skill so that it is observable and
    measurable.

Once the social situation has been identified, it is important for teachers/practitioners to clearly
define the target behavior or skill so that it is observable and measurable. For example, "Bill will
interact appropriately," is less easy to identify than "Bill will greet others by saying, 'Hello,' waving,
or giving a high-five." Cleary defined target behaviors make it easier to teach the skills and to collect
data on the skills. Even more important, it will be easier for the student to learn the expected
behavior or skill.

Step 3. Collecting Baseline Data

1. Teachers/practitioners determine the type of data (e.g., permanent product, assessment)
    needed to assess the target skill.

2. Teachers/practitioners collect data on at least three occasions over three to five days to
    identify the baseline skills of the learner before beginning the intervention.

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Prior to writing and implementing a social narrative, teachers/practitioners should collect baseline (pre-intervention) data on the target behavior or skill to track learning and the effectiveness of the intervention. Sometimes it is helpful to collect data across settings and involve other people in the process (e.g., asking a parent to collect data at home, or another teacher/practitioner to collect data in a different setting).

Step 4. Writing the Social Narrative

1. Teachers/practitioners write the social narrative in language that is appropriate for the learner's age and comprehension.

2. Teachers/practitioners consistently use first or second person, based on learner characteristics.

There are two important features of a well written social narrative. First, teachers/practitioners use words appropriate for the learner's age and comprehension. Second, the author of the narrative consistently uses first or second person, based on the characteristics of the learners. Specifically, the narrative may be written first person, "I will tap the teacher on the shoulder when I want her attention," or second person, "Ben will tap the teacher on the shoulder when Ben wants her attention."

Step 5. Choosing the Appropriate Length of Story

1. Teachers/practitioners select a number of sentences per page that are appropriate for the learner's functioning level and age.

2. Teachers/practitioners construct each sentence (or page) to allow the learner to focus on a specific concept.

The teacher or practitioner should choose a number of sentences per page that is a good match for the learner's age and comprehension. Many learners with ASD are able to help construct their own social narratives and should be encouraged to do so.

Step 6. Including Photos, Picture Icons, or Hand-drawn Pictures

1. Teachers/practitioners use visuals that are appropriate for the individual learner.

2. If appropriate, teachers/practitioners include the learner in creating or selecting pictures to include.

While not all learners will benefit or enjoy illustrations within their social narratives, those that do include visual elements should be appropriate for the learner's age, comprehension ability, and preferences. Again, many learners with ASD can either provide drawings for their own stories, or can be the subject of photos used with the story. Some learners may even enjoy finding clip art on the computer that can be used to supplement the narrative.

Step 7. Implementing the Social Narrative

1. Teachers/practitioners use the social narrative as a regular part of the learner's daily schedule.

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2. Teachers/practitioners read the social narrative to the learner, or the learner is encouraged to read it aloud or silently as part of the daily routine.

Once the social narrative has been constructed, teachers/practitioners will insert the social narrative into the learner's daily routine. This is often done as a precursor to an upcoming event (i.e., the social situation identified in step one). For example, if a learner has a social narrative to support him during passing time between classes, the teacher may choose to have him read the social story just before the bell indicating passing time rings. For a younger or non-reading individual needing support for finding a playmate during recess, the teacher may ask a peer to read the story to her just before recess begins. Social narratives are most successful when they are a regular part of a learner's routine.

Step 8. Monitoring Learner Progress

1. Teachers/practitioners collect data to measure the effectiveness of narrative intervention on the target behavior or skill for a minimum of two weeks.

2. Teachers/practitioners ask others who work or live with the learner to collect data on the target behavior across settings.

As the use of the social narrative becomes part of the learner's routine, teachers/practitioners should collect data on the target behavior to measure learner progress, as well as the effectiveness of the particular social narrative.

Step 9. Reviewing Data and Modifying the Narrative if Necessary

1. Depending on intervention findings, teachers/practitioners may continue to use the narrative, increase use of the narrative, or adapt the narrative.

2. When the social narrative procedures are altered (modification in narrative or frequency), teachers/practitioners change only one variable at a time.

3. Teachers/practitioners collect and review data following each adaptation or change.

In addition to collecting data on the target social situation and behavior, the teacher should review it regularly and use data to inform instructional decisions. If the learner is not progressing toward the intervention goal, teachers/practitioners might consider altering the social narrative procedure. It is important, though, for only one variable or aspect of the social narrative intervention to be changed at a time. For example, in our earlier example, the learner was reading his own social narrative just prior to the bell for passing time. If the collected data indicated that the learner was still having difficulty with the target behavior during passing time, the teacher might consider having him read the story aloud to someone else, having someone else read the story to him, changing the frequency with which the story was used, including more visuals, or changing the wording of the story. Changing only one variable at a time will help to identify what worked and what did not work.

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Step 10. Addressing Generalization and Maintenance of Learned Behavior or Skill

1. Teachers/practitioners promote generalization of the target skill by including multiple peers and/or adults in the social narrative process.

2. Teachers/practitioners promote maintenance of the target skill by fading the use of the narrative and by increasing the time between readings, and/or by having the learner progress from read-aloud to silent reading.

3. If the learner begins to show signs of returning to target baseline levels, the social narrative is reintroduced.

Once the learner begins to show some success with use of social narratives, teachers/practitioners can turn their attention to generalization of the target skill by including multiple peers and/or adults in the social narrative process or by adding new settings. For example, in the earlier example of the little girl using a social narrative prior to recess to learn how to appropriately join others in play by asking to join rather than taking toys away from others, the teacher may have implemented it during the recess time in the classroom following morning snack. To promote generalized use of the target skill, the teacher could add use of the narrative to just before large group, outdoor recess. Another important facet of effective instruction is to promote maintenance of the target skill by fading the use of the narrative by a) increasing the time between readings, b) reducing the number of readings per day and then per week, c) having learners progress from having the narrative read to them to having them read it to themselves (interestingly, even pre-readers can often tell the story by memory after it has been used for a while), or d) by shortening the story to just a few clue words or phrases and one or two pictures as a visual reminder. Many learners with ASD, for whom social narratives are effective, enjoy having them in their routines. If the use of the narrative does not interfere with the regular routines or learning, it is okay to allow students to use the narrative as they desire.

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Implementation Checklist for Social Narratives

The steps used in this implementation checklist were adapted from:

Wragge, A. (2008). *Social narratives: Online training module.* (Lincoln, NE: Nebraska
 Department of Education). In Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI),
 A*utism Internet Modules,* www.autisminternetmodules.org. Columbus, OH: OCALI.

Instructions: The Implementation Checklist includes each of the guidelines for creating and using social narratives as an instructional tool as well as important aspects of implementation for generalized learning. Please complete all of the requested information including the site and state, individual being observed/interviewed, and the learner's initials. To assure that a practice is being implemented as intended, an observation is *always* preferable. This may not always be possible. Thus, items may be scored based on observations with the implementer, discussions and/or record review as appropriate. Within the table, record a 2 (implemented), 1 (partially implemented), 0 (did not implement), or NA (not applicable) next to each step observed to indicate to what extent the step was implemented/addressed during your observation. Use the last page of the checklist to record the target skill, your comments, whether others were present, and plans for next steps for each observation.
Site: _____ State: _____

Individual(s) Observed: _____Learner's Initials: _____

Skills below can be implemented by a practitioner, parent, or other team member

	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
Planning (Steps 1-6)									
Step 1. Identifying the Social Situation for the Intervention	Score**								
1. Refer to learner's IEP/IFSP to identify potential intervention targets.									
2. Discuss goals with team members, including family and learner.									
3. Select a social behavior that will result in positive social interactions, a safer environment, and/or additional social learning opportunities.									
Step 2. Defining the Target Behavior or Skill									
1. Clearly define the target behavior or skill so that it is observable and measurable.									
Step 3. Collecting Baseline Data									
1. Determine the type of data (e.g., permanent product, assessment) needed to assess the target skill.									

**Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable*

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	Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Date								
	Observer's Initials								
Step 3. Collecting Baseline Data (cont.)					Score**				
2. Collect data on at least three occasions over three to five days to determine the learner's skills prior to intervention.									
Step 4. Writing the Social Narrative									
1. Write the social narrative in language that is appropriate for the learner's age and comprehension.									
2. Consistently use first or second person, based on learner characteristics.									
Step 5. Choosing Appropriate Length of Story									
1. Select a number of sentences per page that are appropriate for the learner's functioning level and age.									
2. Construct each sentence (or page) to allow the learner to focus on a specific concept.									
Step 6. Including Photos, Picture Icons, or Hand-Drawn Pictures									
1. Use visuals that are appropriate for the individual learner.									
2. If appropriate, include the learner in creating or selecting pictures to include.									
Intervention (Step 7)									
Step 7. Implementing the Social Narrative									
1. Use the social narrative as a regular part of the learner's daily schedule.									
2. Read the social narrative to the learner, or the learner is encouraged to read it aloud or silently as part of the daily routine.									

**Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

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Observation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Date								
Observer's Initials								
Progress Monitoring (Steps 8-10)								
Step 8. Monitoring Learner Progress	**Score****							
1. Collect data to measure the effectiveness of narrative intervention on the target behavior or skill for a minimum of two weeks.								
2. Ask others who work or live with the learner to collect data on the target behavior across settings.								
Step 9. Reviewing Data and Modifying the Narrative if Necessary								
1. Depending on intervention findings, continue to use the narrative, increase use of the narrative, or adapt the narrative.								
2. When the social narrative procedures are altered (modification in narrative or frequency), change only one variable at a time.								
3. Collect and review data following each adaptation or change.								
Step 10. Addressing Generalization and Maintenance of Learned Behavior or Skill								
1. Promote generalization of the target skill by including multiple peers and/or adults in the social narrative process.								
2. Promote maintenance of the target skill by fading the use of the narrative and by increasing the time between readings, and/or by having the learner progress from read-aloud to silent reading.								
3. If the learner begins to show signs of returning to target baseline levels, the social narrative is reintroduced.								

**Scoring Key: 2 = implemented; 1 = partially implemented; 0 = did not implement; NA = not applicable

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Date	Observer Initials	Target Skill/Behavior, Comments, and Plans for Next Steps
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