PROJECT ACCESS INFORMATION SHEET

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Social Narratives

Social Narratives are the umbrella, or generic, term for strategies that include Social Stories. Social Stories are the copyrighted work of Carol Gray, who first created this strategy. She has a specific "prescription" for writing the stories that has been tried and true. Project ACCESSS recommends using her instructions when developing stories for individual children. See resources below.

We would like to caution you as you look for Social Narratives on the Internet and elsewhere. As with most things, there are good Social Narratives and really bad ones! While Social Narratives are an evidence-based practice, care must be taken with their use. Social Narratives are not a list of rules, they are not negative, and they are not a reading lesson for the individual learner. As defined in the Missouri Autism Guide Initiative Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guide to Evidence-based Interventions, "Story-based interventions identify a target behavior and involve a written description of the situations under which specific behaviors are expected to occur." We think the key work here is expectations. Social Narratives give the individual learner information about expected behavior in whatever context is relevant. We are giving information the learner doesn't already have, not correcting mistakes or bad behavior. The distinction is important. Look at the difference between a really awful Social Narrative and a good one.

Field Trip to McDonald's (really awful Social Narrative)

Our class is going to McDonald's. We will expect you to behave. Don't run around, don't play with your food, and be nice to your friends. Keep your hands and feet to yourself when you board the bus.

Field Trip to McDonald's (much better Social Narrative)

Our class is going to McDonald's. I will ride on the bus with my classmates. I ride the bus back and forth to school, so I already know the bus rules. McDonald's will probably be full of other people. It might be noisy. Our teacher will take us to the counter to ask for our food. I will probably be able to smell all the food at McDonald's. If I look above the counter, I will see a list of many foods. This is called a menu. I can choose something for the menu…and the story goes on.

So, what are the differences between a good Social Narrative and an awful one? A good Social Narrative is written in a positive tone. It is written in first person- from the learner's perspective. It has lots of description. The learner needs to know when it looks like this, sounds like this, smells like this; this is the expected behavior. A good Social Narrative explains ambiguous terms. What does "be nice" mean? What does "behave" mean? We thought the learner in the better Social Narrative might not know what menu meant, so we explained it.

Social Narratives have been studied with learners from 6 to 14 years, but our experience is that the stories are successful with all ages. The content and vocabulary need to be adjusted, but the concept is the same.

We recommend again that you study Carol Gray's Social Story information. Her newest book is The New Social Story Book, and it is published by Future Horizons. The book includes many sample Social Stories and a detailed tutorial on development of Social Stories for your learner.

Here is a link to Carol Gray's Social Story website: http://carolgraysocialstories.com/

If you would like to download the MAGI Autism Spectrum Disorders: Guide to Evidence-based Intervention, you can go to this link:

www.autismguidelines.dmh.mo.gov