

Make a social story

A social story explains a certain situation, a skill, a problem or a concept and how your child might deal with it. It describes how your child might behave, and what they can do, in a particular social setting.

The story is written from the child's point of view and takes them, step by step, through the situation. A social story aims to be as specific as possible to the needs of the audience (your child).

Social stories are an excellent way for caregivers to give information to a child in a straightforward, respectful and positive way.

The steps below guide you to create a story about starting school, but could be used for any topic.

Prepare by collecting some information

Communicate with the school and your child's teacher to collect information, take photographs or record video to help you create your stories.

- What does the school look like?
- How will your child get there every day?
- Who are the important adults they will encounter? (For example, teaching team, learning support team, school principal, specialist educators, crossing supervisor.)
- What does the teacher do and how will they help your child learn?
- What are the daily routines that will be followed? (For example, what happens when they arrive at school? Do they line up to enter the room? Is there a morning routine in the classroom? What happens at lunchtime/playtime? Are there rules to follow for going to the toilets or leaving the room?)
- What are the main spaces they will use in the school (classroom, lunch and play areas)?
- What types of things will they learn? (Talk about common activities like singing, letters and sounds, counting.)
- What are some of the main classroom activities they will be involved in? (For example, whole-class activities, small-group tasks, using mobile devices.)
- What activities will your child experience outside of the classroom? (For example, lunchtime, school assembly, school library visit, sport.)



Think about your story

- Choose a title that lets you know what the story is about.
- Think about the structure. The story needs an introduction, a main body and a conclusion.
- Choose ideas that are easy for your child to understand.
- Focus on the positive (what your child can or should do, not what they shouldn't do).
- Use sentences that describe who, where, when, what, how and why something happens.



Write your story

If possible, write the story with your child. Talk with them about going to school and write down any ideas. Keep each story short, focusing on one event – for this story it will be going to school. You can create other stories that focus on different parts of the day.

Begin with four basic sentence types:

- **Descriptive sentences:** use the 'wh' questions (who, what, when, where, why and how) as a guide for developing the story content. For example:
 - › Descriptive question: Who is my teacher?
 - › Descriptive sentence: Schools can be big or small. Our school is small.
- **Perspective sentences:** describe other people's thoughts, feelings, knowledge, beliefs and desires. For example:
 - › My teacher thinks it is kind to wait for your turn to speak.
 - › Some of my classmates might like drawing like I do.
- **Directive or coaching sentences:** talk about actions or behaviours and emphasise effort by the child. For example:
 - › I will try to ask for help.
 - › I can play on the swings or maybe with something else.
- **Affirmative sentences:** stress an important point or a rule. For example:
 - › I wear my headphones when it's noisy in the classroom.

As you and your child become more familiar with the purpose of a story you might want to include sentences that you write together:

- **Control sentences:** describe a personal strategy your child will use. They are best discussed and agreed with your child first. For example:
 - › When someone doesn't want to play with me, I can ask someone else.
- **Cooperative sentences:** describe what others will do to help your child. For example:
 - › My mum and dad will help me pack my backpack for school.

Make your story

A social story can be printed out or digital (such as a slide presentation or even a video). The important thing is that it talks about the places, people and activities your child will encounter.

Create the social story and involve your child in this process. As you create the story, talk about what you are doing – discuss any illustrations and point out key ideas.

1. Decide the format of the social story: hard copy, digital or both.
2. Collect information about the school, the teachers and school activities and places.
3. Take photos of spaces within the school (classrooms, assembly hall, toilets, playground) or use material from the school's website to put into the social story.
4. Create a page for each of the main sections of the story (Spaces, Timetable, Teachers, Routines, Equipment) and include illustrations about the information on the page.
5. Complete the story with a title and a closing credit (for example, *Written by Mum and Sally, January 2023*).

You can make an individualised social story on any topic by creating a booklet, a slide presentation or by downloading and filling in the [Social story template \[PDF\]](#).

Use the story

1. Set up a regular time and routine to read the social story with your child.
2. Ask questions about the social story to check the child's understanding, including talking about when things might change. For example:

This is where you will sit for story time. Can you see the stars on the floor? That's where you can sit. Other children will sit on their stars near you so they can listen to the story too. Which colour star do you like? Where would you sit if someone is already sitting on your star?
3. Watch your child's behaviour after reading and talking about the story and see how using the social story has helped your child with their move to school.
4. Revisit the story as often as your child needs. They may enjoy re-reading the story long after they have settled into school, so keep it somewhere they can easily find.

Prefer not to create your own story?

You can download the illustrated story [Getting ready for school in the morning \[PDF\]](#) to share and discuss with your child.



Resources for families: <https://studentwellbeinghub.edu.au/parents/topics/autism-families/starting-school/>