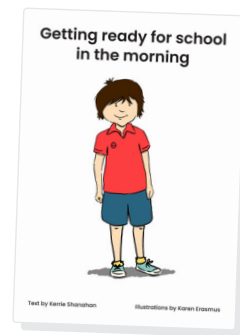


Getting ready for school in the morning: Discussion notes

These notes provide:

- an overview of what a social story is
- an explanation of how a social story can be helpful
- hints on reading this social story with your child.



What is a social story?

A social story explains a certain situation, a skill, a problem or a concept and how your child might deal with this. 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.

Who do social stories best help?

Social stories are a powerful tool for students on the autism spectrum. Routines help children to know what is expected. Having a consistent routine provides security and reduces unpredictable events for your child.

About this social story: *Getting ready for school in the morning*

The aim of this story is to help your child understand what their morning routine is on a school day, and to prepare them for this routine. This can reduce your child's anxiety and help make school mornings run smoothly.

The story starts with waking up in the morning. It then follows the steps involved in getting ready for school, such as having breakfast, getting dressed, going to school and saying goodbye to family.

Personalise your story

If the order of events in this story do not match your child's routine, you can reorder the pages or slides to suit you.

You can also use the [Social story template \[PDF\]](#) to create your own, personalised version of the story.

Encourage your child to be part of creating this story. For example, you might ask: *Can you help me think of the things you need to do when you are getting ready for school? What do you do first? What things do we need to remember to put in your school bag?*

You could use drawings or use photos of your child doing each of the steps in the story.

Reading *Getting ready for school in the morning*

You might like to think about the following tips before reading the story with your child.

- When sharing the story, choose a quiet time and place, so you can both focus on the story and enjoy it together.
- Be positive and reassuring as you read the story. You want to show that starting school will be fine, and that you are there to help your child get ready.
- Read the story often leading up to the first day of school. This will help your child to become familiar with their daily routine before it begins. Continue reading the story once your child has started school to reinforce the steps in the routine.
- Share the social story with your child's school and ask for the story to become part of your child's personalised plan.

What if things don't go to plan?

Your morning routine will not always go as smoothly as it is written about in this social story. That is fine, and to be expected. If this happens often, you might like to think about changing your routine.

- Do you need to allow more time in the mornings?
- Do you need to simplify your instructions?
- Can you do some of the steps the night before, such as packing your child's school bag or putting out their uniform?
- Do you need to talk to your child's teacher about the handover at school?

Use the following notes as you read the story with your child.

Front cover

Read the title and introduce the book positively. For example, you could say: *This book is about getting ready for school in the morning. It can help us to remember what we need to do each school morning.*

Waking up

Tell your child that on school mornings they can wake up at the same time each day. If your child needs to be woken in the morning, let them know how this can happen. It might be an alarm, or a member of the family might wake them.

Let your child know who can help them get ready for school. It might be the same person each day, or different people on different days.

Eating breakfast

After reading this page, talk about details that are specific to your child. For example, you could say: *You like to have cereal **and** toast with vegemite for breakfast. That is OK. You have time for that. You won't have to rush.*



Brushing teeth

Talk about any other toileting or hygiene-based routines that your child might need to do, such as taking medication or brushing their hair.

Some children are sensitive about getting their hair brushed and this can be challenging. Talk with your child about how they can have their hair done for school, such as tying up long hair. Think about strategies that work for your child in regard to doing their hair.

Getting dressed

You might like to get your child's school uniform and hat ready the night before. Perhaps lay it on a chair or on top of some drawers in your child's bedroom. To avoid frustration, think about what things your child might need help with, such as doing up buttons, tying shoelaces or putting items on the right way around.

After reading this page, talk about anything that is specific to your child when getting dressed. For example, you could say: *After you put on your shoes, I can do up the laces. Tying laces is difficult, and lots of children need help with this. Or: The buttons on your shirt are tricky. I can help you do them up.*

Reinforce to your child that it is OK to ask for help when they are getting dressed.

This is also a good opportunity to talk with your child about:

- days where they might wear something different, such as special dress-up days, casual clothes days or sports days
- other culturally specific clothing that they might wear to school
- wearing clothes appropriate for the weather, such as a school jumper or jacket on cold days.

Applying sunscreen

Explain to your child that putting on sunscreen daily is an important part of protecting their skin from sun damage.

Some children with sensory issues can find applying sunscreen challenging, so allowing time and practising can be helpful.

Packing your school bag

Point out the things your child will need to pack every day, such as their lunch box and drink bottle. Explain that on some days they can pack other things in their school bag, such as their library book or a reading book. For example, you could say: *When you have library, we will pack your library book into your school bag too.*

Getting to school

Talk with your child about how they travel to school. For example, you might drive to school, go on a bus or walk to school.

Talk about this part of the day in a positive way. For example, you could say: *You can listen to your favourite music in the car on the way to school. Or: When we walk to school, we can count how many red cars we see.*

Talk to your child about times when the way they get to school might be different. For example, when it rains you might drive, or when you don't have the car to use, you might take the bus.

Arriving at school

What your child does once they arrive at school in the morning will vary from school to school, and even from class to class. Find out before the first day of school where you and your child need to go. Some things to think about:

- Do you meet outside the classroom? Does your child line up? Does your child put their school bag in the line?
- Does your child play in the yard before going into the classroom? If so, where do they put their school bag?
- Do you go inside to a hallway, or reception area? Does your child have a hook to hang their school bag on?
- Do you take your child inside the classroom?
- Does the teacher meet you outside the classroom?
- Does your child need to put their hat, drink bottle or lunch in a particular place, such as a lunch basket or locker?



Knowing these details may help to make the morning routine run more smoothly. If need be, you could change the social story to include your child's specific routine.

Putting your school bag away

Ask your child's teacher what the class routine is so you can explain it to your child.

After reading this page in the book, explain to your child in more detail what they can do when they arrive at school. For example, you could say: *When we get to school, we can go inside, and hang your school bag on your peg. Or: When we get to school, you can put your school bag in the class line outside the classroom, then we can wait for the teacher.*



The school bell

Most schools have a bell or another sound to let students know it is time to go into class. Talk with your child about the sound that they will hear at their school. For example, you could say: *At your school there is a bell. It sounds loud, but that is OK. We know this loud bell just means that it is time to get ready for learning.*

You could also talk about other uses of the school's loudspeaker system. For example, you could say: *Sometimes there will be announcements that you hear on the speakers. These might sound loud too, but that is OK. It is a way of telling everyone in the school something important.*

Saying goodbye

The parent/carer 'handover' to the teacher can be a challenging time. Try to have a consistent routine when saying goodbye to your child.

If your child has difficulty separating from you, make a plan with their teacher. Think about what works best for your child.

After reading this page, explain what your child can do when you leave. For example, you could say: *Once we see Mrs Hall, I will say goodbye and leave. You can stay with Mrs Hall, and she can tell you what to do. Mrs Hall will look after you.*



Remind your child that they have done this before. For example, you could say: *Saying goodbye to me is just like saying goodbye at preschool. You were really good at that.*

Reinforce that your child's teacher is there to help. And remember, things don't always go to plan. Sometimes your child won't see their teacher when they arrive at school. There may be a relief teacher, classes might be combined, or students meet somewhere else for a special event. Arrange with your child's school to let you know of any changes, so you can talk with your child beforehand.

At school!

Reinforce what a great job your child is doing getting ready for school.

To further prepare your child for school you might like to:

- practise getting ready for school on the holidays so your child can get used to the routine without any stress about being late
- practise packing and eating lunch over the holidays so you can help your child identify the food for morning tea and the food for lunch
- practise putting on the uniform and wearing it to identify any sensory concerns such as labels sticking out or itchy fabric
- practise packing items in the school bag
- practise going to school – walking, in a car, on the bus
- visit the school beforehand to show your child important places such as where their classroom is, where they will line up and where the playground is
- talk about the after-school pick-up routine.

Other considerations

- **Routine changes**

Your child's school morning routine might change as the year progresses. For example, for the first days or weeks of school students may go straight inside the classroom, but then later they might be expected to play outside until the bell goes. These changes can be difficult, especially if your child isn't aware of them, so talking about this part of your child's routine is helpful.

- **Playtime options**

Discuss with your child's school what students can do during unstructured times of the day, such as before school and during recess and lunchtimes. These might include using the playground, playing with blocks in the library, or playing with sports equipment. Talk with your child about the things they might do during these times.

- **Buddy system**

Some schools have a buddy system where children are paired up with another student who can support them at school. If your school has this system, you could arrange to meet with their buddy when you arrive at school.



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