

# Social Narratives: A Story Intervention for Children with Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities

By Sonia Morris

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*Social Narratives* by Sonia Morris is a well organised guide for teachers, families and caregivers of children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Morris describes how and why social narratives are a useful intervention that can improve social competence and quality of life for children with social difficulties. While stating that the aim of the social narrative is to explain behaviour, Morris also refers to it as an effective strategy for lowering anxiety levels experienced by children with social difficulties. The author's child-centred approach is apparent throughout the book and thereby helps the adult to see the world through the eyes of the child.

The first three chapters and the sixth chapter explore the strength of social narratives. The explanation of the theories of autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) is clear and well-defined. Morris then effectively describes how these theories are applied to social narratives. This information is important background knowledge for all working with children with autism. As social narratives are not a suitable intervention for all, Morris clearly explains early in the book that there are certain considerations that must be taken into account. As social narratives are a language-based intervention, one of the considerations identified is that comprehension of the verbal information is vital for the child to adopt a desired behaviour.

Chapter 6 details a research study supporting the use of social narratives. The *social validity* section is interesting and relevant to how a child might react to the intervention. Presenting feedback from children who received a social narrative intervention again demonstrates the child-centred approach of the author. The research reports that the majority of children were motivated, liked their story, thought the interventions were helpful and felt happy after reading their story. Personally, I would place this chapter after Chapter 3, so that all the research and background supporting information is together before the task of writing, presenting and implementing the social narrative is addressed.

Chapters 4 and 5 give clear explanations on the process of creating and delivering a social narrative intervention. These chapters mark the practical and user-friendly aspect of this book. The author changes her style to address the reader directly. This has the effect of engaging the reader on a personal level. The step-by-step approach to writing, presenting and implementing a social narrative is outlined in a clear, focused and practical manner. The reader is appropriately reminded about important elements of social narrative writing through *Top Tip* paragraphs. These paragraphs have a shaded background and stand out clearly on the page. Throughout these chapters Morris stresses the importance of a positive approach that is informed by the needs, strengths and interests of the child. She explains the importance of appropriate language, clear structure, a variety of sentence types, pictures and comprehension questions and identifies these as key elements to successful social narrative writing. The table on p. 37 is a useful summary and description of the types of sentences used to construct a social narrative. Correct implementation is clearly presented with good advice on when and how to fade the story. An excellent feature of the book is the quick reference guide and checklist in Chapter 7 which can be used to ensure that all the requirements of the social narrative have been met. Morris also includes some solutions to problems that she has encountered and this adds to the practical usefulness of the book.

The book concludes with some sample social narratives that are inspired by stories used successfully with children with ASDs. There is a broad range and level of narrative included here which can be adapted as required. Morris reminds the reader to personalise the story, remembering to include the interests of the child and to tailor the stories to the child's reading competencies.

In conclusion, this book offers a practical and child-centred approach to social narrative writing. It is user-friendly and can be used in a home or school setting. In my opinion the strength of the social narratives described in this book lies in the child-centred approach which uses personal information and pictures of the child for whom the story is written. Children with ASDs are generally visual learners and pictures of themselves are highly motivating. Each story is unique and the physical presence of a single narrative which includes special interests and photos can become a treasured possession of a child with ASD. This in itself can reinforce the social lesson that the narrative was designed to teach.

**SOCIAL NARRATIVES: A STORY INTERVENTION FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES** by Sonia Morris is published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London, 2015 and costs Stg. £22.99.

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