HOW TO WRITE A SOCIAL STORY

Step 1: Pick a Topic

Social stories generally are to teach a rule (ex: "I keep my hands to myself"), addressing a problem (ex: "I only put food in my mouth), a concept (ex: "when I need help, I use my words"), or to address a scenario (ex: "This is what happens when I go to the dentist"). Pick a topic the person you're making the story for needs help with, and we'll focus on that one!

Step 2: Write a Story

Here's my formula. I personalize the story in the first page – I generally start with their name and something positive related to the story. Then I address the problem situation. I move on to explaining how to address the situation. I list ways that making good choices or getting through the situation can have a positive consequence. And then I just have a cut and pasted conclusion, talking about how happy or proud everyone will be. See the attachment for examples of social stories, including fill in the blank versions you can use to make your own!

I would caution you against using the word "not". That's actually a higher level linguistic concept that users – even some who can read and have high expressive language – often don't understand. Instead, focus on the replacement behavior. Instead of saying "I do not hit", try saying "I use nice hands." Instead of saying "I don't cut in line", say "I wait my turn". Etc.

Step 3: Determine what the user understands

Are they a completely fluent reader? Then you don't have to worry about pictures unless you're adding them to make it look pretty – just open a regular Word document and type out the story in it! If the user doesn't read, do they understand symbols, such as drawings? Making the link between an actual object and a squiggle with some colors on it (which is what a drawing looks like if you don't make that connections) is a more advanced ability and not everyone has it. If you're not sure, I'd stick with only using photos in your story, to make it more likely that the user will make the connection between the photo and what it's depicting.

Step 4: Make sure your story easy to comprehend

If there's a picture, it should relate as closely as you can get it to the concept being discussed. Google Images is a great place to just go, copy photos, and paste them into your social story! Just type what you're searching for into google.com/images. What photo should you pick? One that is so clear that the user doesn't have to be able to read to understand the page. So if the page said "I use nice hands" I might include a photo of clasped hands. Brownie points if your photos are of the user themselves or the actual environment or object involved.

Step 5: Choose your format

Are you going to make your story into an actual book, or is it just going to be all on one page? You get to choose. For a user who has difficulties with getting distracted or enjoys the process of turning pages in a book, I like to make a book with pages, so I can help my user focus. If they're pretty advanced and just need a reminder every so often, I might just type it all on one page. It's up to your judgment as to what will work best for the user. For students who are strong communicators, you can even ask them what they'd prefer!

If you're making a book, there are several ways you can do it. First, you can just have REALLY big pages and have each line and photo take up a whole page. No formatting required for this! Me, though, I like smaller pages – it takes less paper and ink! To do this, just put in a line and a photo on each half of the page. Depending on your version of Word, it will look something like this (just with your photos and text).
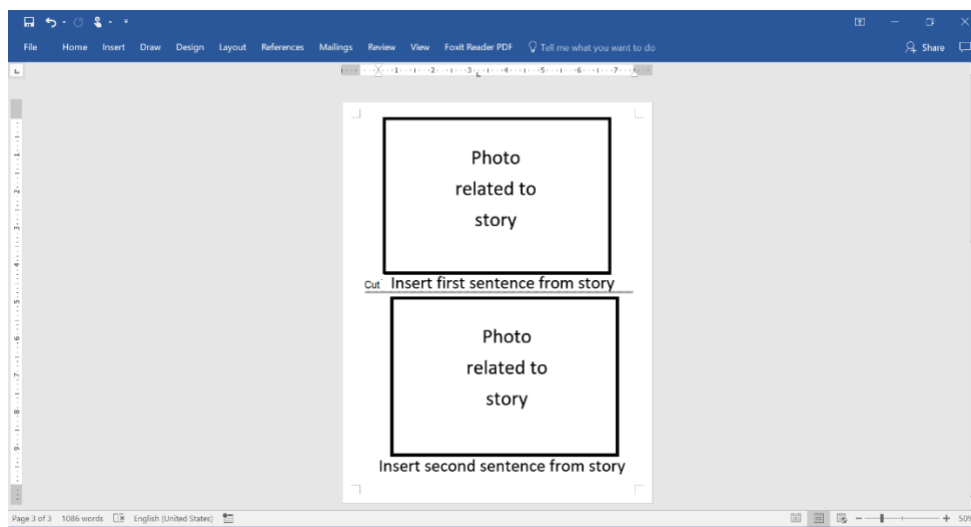
And then just print and cut out your pages!

Step 6: Put it all together

Is this just something you'll read once and be done with? Then you can just print and show your user and you're done! Otherwise, though, you might want to print on card stock or a thicker paper and/or laminate your story. Many schools have laminators they'll let you use if it's to benefit one of their students. You can also take your story in to a local Fed-Ex, Kinko's, etc and pay to have them laminate it for you. After you've got it laminated, I tend to punch a hole in all the pages and put it on a book ring, and you're good!

And you're done!

Congratulations, you made a social story! It gets a LOT easier after the first one. And remember, to make things easier for you I've even included some fill in the blank samples to fit lots of situations – feel free to use it. (And you can if you want, but there's no need to give me attribution. I'm happy to help!) All that's left is to read the story to the user! Make sure you read it in situations where the user is calm, and review it frequently, especially right before the scenario.

SOCIAL STORY TEMPLATES

Teaching a rule:

My name is _____ and I go to school at [school] (or substitute the other environment the rule addresses).
At school, when I [scenario], I know I need to [follow the rule].
I can do this by [things child needs to do to follow the rule].
By [following the rule], I can [positive consequence].
When I [follow the rule], my friends and teachers at school feel happy with me, and I do, too!

Addressing a problem:

My name is _____ and I like to [something related to your story].
But sometimes when I [something related to your story], I [problem you're addressing].
This can make my [friends, family, whoever is affected] feel [negative feeling that results].
That can make [negative consequence for user of story].
So now when I feel like [doing problem behavior], I [replacement behaviors – acceptable things the child can do instead of doing the problem behavior, but that still address whatever need was creating the problem in the first place] instead.
When I make good choices, my friends and family feel happy and I feel happy, too!

Teaching a concept:

My name is _____ and I like to [something related to story].
Sometimes when [scenario], [problems that can result from not understanding concept happens].
This can [cause negative consequence].
So now when I [scenario where concept is being taught] I [concept being taught] so [positive consequence].
When I [use concept], my friends and family feel happy and I feel happy, too!

Preparing or explaining situation:

My name is [blank] and I [something related to the situation].
Sometimes I have to go to/do [situation]. Thinking about going to/doing [situation] made me feel [emotion].
But it's okay, because now I know just what I'm going to do when I [situation].
First I [first step in situation]
Then I [second step] (continue for as many steps as needed)
If I feel [emotion], I know I can always [coping skill].
I know when I do [blank] I get to [do positive consequence]. This makes me feel good.
Now that I know all about [situation], I feel better! My family is proud of me!

Filled in Example:

Page 1: My name is Mohammed and I like to feel clean. [Photo of Mohammed, or a clean happy child.] **Page 2:** Sometimes when my mom asks me to brush my teeth, I tell her no and go to bed with dirty teeth. [Photo of child saying no or of not brushed teeth.] **Page 3:** This can make my breath smell bad and my teeth hurt. [Photo of child holding jaw or looking like they're in pain.] **Page 4:** Other people think bad breath is gross, and I don't like it when my teeth hurt. [Photo of sad child.] **Page 5:** So now when I am told to brush my teeth, I use my special ninja turtle toothbrush, and brush until my sand timer runs out! [Photo of toothbrush or sand timer.] **Page 6:** Then my mom will give me a gold star! [Photo of gold star] **Page 7:** When I brush my teeth, my friends and family feel happy and I feel happy, too! [Photo of happy family or of thumbs up.]