

Practical Strategies for Autistic Pupils Returning to Education Settings



Hello and welcome to the autism education trust. This presentation is for anyone working closely with autistic pupils to support the transition back to education settings

It will give you practical strategies and ideas about how to best prepare and support autistic children and young people to return.

Learning Aims

- To consider the actions you can take to prepare autistic pupils for the return to education settings.



By the end of this presentation our hope is that you will be able:

Preparing autistic pupils....

- Arrange a walk round visit or virtual tour.
- Provide a photobook.
- Provide video information of new staff.

Where possible it may be useful for the pupil to visit the school with their parent/carer for a walk round to get used to all the adaptations due to Covid-19. This will give the pupil a chance to familiarise themselves with any new layouts and gives them an opportunity to ask questions. It would be good if this visit could take place when the environment is not too busy or overwhelming. Ensure there is a familiar teacher to show the pupil round. If this is not possible, you might consider providing a video virtual tour of the school on your school website with additional positive messages from staff welcoming pupils back to school as this can reduce anxiety about possible changes.

A photobook will familiarise the pupil with the education setting and share important information. They might include photographs of spaces such as classrooms, hall, cloakrooms, outside spaces, adults-teachers, supporting adults, admin etc. These might specifically focus on changes that have taken place to that pupil's setting and environment or to the relationships they might encounter. However, this should also focus on those elements that have not changed and are therefore predictable and provide security to that pupil.

You might include a map of the school. These photobooks can be kept and referred to regularly and can link school and home. For some pupils these will be required specifically, but others may only need this information provided generically through your school website.

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Preparing autistic pupils...

- Create and clearly label safe spaces.
- Emphasise anything that remains the same.



Create and clearly label safe spaces that the autistic child or young person has permission to use whenever they are feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Give them an easy way to communicate they need a break, such as a card they can hold up. Make sure these environments are low arousal. In your handout, Appendix E - Communication Cards will support this.

Remember it is important to provide visual information about the changes but also focus on what remains the same as any kind of familiarity will decrease anxiety. This information can be provided in photo books and social stories.

Preparing autistic pupils....

- Provide (or write with the family) personalised social stories to use at home.
- Video examples or visual instructions of new rules.
- Virtual question and answer preparation sessions for pupils (and parents).

Take time to read through social stories beforehand and encourage parents to do the same. Social stories should be individually tailored for the pupil. They teach social skills explicitly through improved social understanding. You can use them to : -teach about the return to school - to teach about the changes to your environment, teaching arrangements etc. Social stories are a positive way to rehearse specific situations and expectations.

Please see Appendix D in your handout for instructions on how to write a really good social story. The most important thing is that the story is tailored to the individual CYP.

Where possible provide video examples or visual instructions of new rules and routines e.g. entering school, queuing in the canteen, sitting arrangements for lessons.

Run a few virtual question and answer preparation sessions for pupils (and parents). This will give them an opportunity to ask questions about how school life has changed.

Checklist...

- Does the pupil know what their timetable will be?
- Does the pupil know what will be expected of them during the first few weeks?
- Does the pupil have an identified safe space they can retreat to?
- Have you shared updated information about the pupil with all their teachers and support staff?



In your handout we have provided a checklist, including these and more, as a means of making sure that you have prepared as much as possible in advance for the pupils return. Please see Appendix E.

Most importantly it is vital that you have communicated any changes with pupils and their parents and that you have shared this in advance to give the family time to prepare for the return.



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Further AET Resources...

- Covid-19 Information Centre:

<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/covid-19-information-centre/>

Where you will find our latest Tools for Teachers Covid-19 edition booklet and a wealth of support materials from our partners across England.

- All of our Covid-19 content is free to access and download. The full Tools for Teachers, consisting of 44 tools, is available to purchase for £35.99 here:

<https://www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/shop/>

The AET are here to help you support autistic children and young people during the Covid-19 pandemic and transition back to school.

You can find our latest Tools for Teachers Covid-19 edition booklet and a wealth of support materials from our partners across England. All of our Covid-19 content is free to access and download. Our popular [Tools for Teachers](#) resource, consisting of 44 tools, costs £35.99 but, in response to the circumstances, we have created a complementary collection of 6 tools that we think you will find most helpful in the current situation.



Appendix D - Social stories

What is it?

A Social Story™ (Carol Gray) is a short description of a particular social situation, event or activity which includes specific and accurate social information about what to expect and why. A Social Story can provide a pupil with some idea of how others might respond in a particular situation, and therefore provide a framework for appropriate behaviour. The story is written to a specific structure and format includes social cues, perspectives and appropriate responses. Social Stories™ are designed to be reassuring for the pupil. Their aim is not to change behaviour but to identify and share information that supports alternate responses.

Social Stories™ answer “wh” questions:

- where and when the situation occurs
- who is involved
- how events are sequenced
- what occurs
- why

When would you use it?

To assist autistic pupils to develop greater social understanding by identifying important cues in any given situation. Social Stories™ can be used for a variety of purposes including introducing changes and new routines, explaining the reasons for the behaviour of others, teaching situation-specific social skills, describing routines, rules, situations, upcoming events or abstract concepts, developing understanding around expectations, applauding accomplishments and assisting in teaching new academic skills. Social Stories™ also help peers to see things from the perspective of another pupil, and why s/he might appear to respond or behave in a particular way.

How to use it?

The process begins with the identification of pupil needs through observation and assessment. Once a difficult situation is identified, the practitioner observes the situation and attempts to consider the perspective of the pupil in terms of what will be seen, heard, and felt. A



story should be written at an appropriate level of comprehension for the pupil, and includes descriptive, directive, and perspective statements.

Social Stories™ can vary in presentation from sentences and pictures to newsletter format. They may be written from either a first-person perspective, for younger or more challenged individuals (presenting information from the individual's point of view) or a third-person perspective for older, more advanced individuals, adolescents or adults. These may be more akin to 'Social Articles' and resemble a newspaper article.

Guidance for writing Social Stories™

- State behaviour positively (state what to do rather than what not to do)
- Avoid referring to negative behaviour
- Describe more than direct
- Tailor the story to the individual's abilities and interests
- Beware of presenting literally accurate information
- Begin by identifying the topic of the Social Story™. Topics are identified by the individual's experiences and responses to his/her social world. The title may positively identify main topic

When writing the Social Story™, keep three parts in mind:

- A. Introduction (clearly states the topic)
- B. Body (adds detail by offering descriptions and / or explanations)
- C. Conclusion (reinforces and summarises the information)

Social Stories™ are written to a specific format which involves **6** different types of statement- descriptive, perspective, cooperative, affirmative, directive and control.

1. The descriptive sentence provides information on the setting, activity and people.

Descriptive sentences

- are truthful & observable statements of fact
- identify the most relevant factors in a situation
- are opinion and assumption free
- are logical and accurate
- often contain answers to the "wh" questions
- My name is _____ (often the 1st sentence)



'Usually children go outside at play time'.

2. The perspective statement provides a description of the possible reactions of others. They refer to or describe the internal state of other people: their knowledge/thoughts, feelings, beliefs, opinions, motivation or physical condition/health

'My brother usually likes to watch cartoons'. (feelings)

'Some children work hard to finish their maths so that they can have some time at the computer'. (motivation)

3. The cooperative sentence

- identifies what others will do to assist the individual
- reminds parents, peers and/or professionals of their role in the success of the individual
- may ensure a consistent response by a variety of people

'The bus driver will remind me of where I sit on the bus'.

'My teacher will help me with my work'.

4. The affirmative sentence

- enhances the meaning of statements & may express a commonly shared value or opinion within a given culture (not of one individual or small group)
- stresses an important point, refer to a law or rule or reassure the reader

'I need to keep my seat belt fastened. This is very important'.

'The toilet makes a sound when it flushes. This is OK'.

5. The directive sentence

- presents a suggested response or choice of responses to a situation or concept
- gently directs the behaviour

'On the playground I can play in the sandbox or go on the swings or climb on the monkey bars'.



'I will try to stay quiet and listen'.

'I may ask Mum or Dad for a hug'.

6. Control sentences

- are statements that are written by the autistic individual
- identify personal strategies the individual will use to recall and apply information

'If my sand castle breaks, my friend can help me build another one'.

'I can keep a torch beside my bed just in case we have a power cut'.

The sentences fit into two categories:

Those that describe: descriptive, perspective, cooperative and affirmative

Those that direct: directive and control

There should be more descriptive than directive sentences, so for every 6 sentences you should try and have 1 or 2 directive/control sentences

Social Stories™ should be written for an individual pupil and a specific situation and therefore it is not really appropriate to provide an example. The Social Story™ below is included in order to exemplify the six types of sentence.

*Some people wear glasses. **Descriptive***

*Wearing glasses is okay. **Affirmative***

*Some people can hardly see at all without their glasses! **Perspective***

*Sometimes, people take off their glasses to play sports, or go to gym class, or wrestle. **Descriptive***

*It is a good idea for people to take off their glasses if they are in a gym or playing sports or _____ . **Affirmative (partial)***

*I can remind myself that it is important for people to wear glasses at other times, e.g. if they are at home, or in class, or reading, or driving, or _____ . **Control (partial)***

Wearing glasses is a good thing because it helps people see clearly.

Affirmative

Gray and Garand (1993) suggest three basic approaches for implementing a Social Story™:



For a pupil who reads independently, the story is read twice by an adult, followed by the pupil reading it back. Then the pupil reads it daily.

If the pupil does not read, the story may be recorded with a signal (i.e. bell) to turn the pages or videoed with one page on the screen at a time.

The pupil is taught to read the story, and reads it daily. It is also useful to use visual images to illustrate the story.



Appendix E - Return to School Checklist for Staff

Pointer	Check	Comments
Has the pupil visited their classrooms or seen photographs of the layout?		
Has the pupil met new staff members or seen photographs of them?		
Does the pupil know what their timetable will be?		
Does the pupil know what will be expected of them during the first few weeks?		
Has the pupil been given a map of the school?		
Has the pupil been given visual instructions e.g how to navigate a one way system.		
Does the pupil have an identified safe space they can retreat to?		
Have you shared updated information about the pupil with all relevant teachers and support staff?		
Has new vocabulary been explained to the pupil e.g 'bubble'.		

Appendix F - Communication Cards

**I want
to go
outside**

**I need
help**

**I want to
wash my
hands**

**I need
a break**