

# Do Social Stories Help Children with Autism Improve Social Skills?

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 **Question:** Do Social Stories Help Children with Autism Improve Social Skills?

Social stories are short, carefully crafted stories written to help children (and adults) with autism to navigate specific situations. In theory, they allow people with autism to prepare for and rehearse social interactions - thus reducing anxiety, improving behavior, and helping set the stage for building solid relationships. Does this theory really hold water?

**Answer:** Evidence suggests that social stories - developed with a specific approach and format - really do make a difference in helping people with autism cope with social interactions. But it's important the the stories be constructed appropriately.

According to the [Healing Thresholds website](#) (citing Carol Gray, developer of the Social Story(tm)):

Each social story uses several different types of sentences:

Descriptive sentences give who, what, where, and why details about the situation so the child can recognize when that situation actually occurs.

Directive sentences tell the child the appropriate social responses in that situation.

Perspective sentences describe one of the child's possible feelings or responses.

Affirmative sentences give the child a sense of what others may be thinking or feeling in that situation. What does this mean?

Cooperative sentences describe how other people will help out in a given situation.

Control sentences are created by the child, to help remember strategies that work for him or her.

In addition, social stories must reflect a child's level of verbal understanding, the reality of the situation, and the child's feelings about the situation. For example, if a child feels anxious about eating lunch in the cafeteria, the social story should reflect those real feelings (rather than say "eating in the cafeteria is fun!").

Studies conducted by researchers in the field of autism do suggest that social stories work. In part, researchers believe, social stories address a major issue in autism: lack of "theory of mind." Theory of mind is the ability to understand that others see, feel, and react differently than oneself. By providing children with clear, understandable information about how others might feel and respond, social stories may reduce anxiety and build confidence. And, of course, as children encounter positive responses from others, they are less frustrated, behave more typically, are more easily accepted, and feel better about themselves.

So far, though the research is positive, the studies that have been conducted are small and limited. But that's no reason to avoid using social stories. After all - there are no potential risks, no side effects, and the worst that can possibly happen is... nothing!