

SOCIAL STORIES™

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and/or other disabilities may experience difficulty in social situations in terms of recognising social cues and behaving in appropriate ways.

PROPOSED SOLUTION/ INTERVENTION

A Social Story™ is a story, often accompanied by pictures, that is written and specifically tailored to meet the needs of the individual child. The Social Story™ uses a prescriptive style and format to describe a situation, skill, or concept in terms of relevant social cues, perspectives, and common responses. The aim of the Social Story™ is to increase the social understanding of the child and to teach appropriate behaviours.

THE THEORETICAL RATIONALE – HOW DOES IT WORK?

Theoretical explanations for the reputed efficacy of Social Stories™ have not been described in any detail. Social Stories™ do, however, include aspects of purported good practice in ASD. Social Stories™ are visual, permanent, written in simple language, provide factual information, are based on careful assessment of the child, and often focus on key areas of concern in ASD (e.g., social interaction, perceptions of others).

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY? WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE FOR THEIR EFFICACY?

Existing research is limited although it is rapidly expanding. Four recent reviews of Social Stories™

research have been conducted. In each case, it was concluded that there was only limited empirical evidence in support of the intervention and many questions remain. It is unclear that the prescribed (and complex) story construction is necessary to the efficacy of the intervention, which components are critical to effectiveness and whether Social Stories™ add to the effects of other interventions. A serious problem in much existing research is that Social Stories are often used in combination with other well-validated interventions. Thus, it is difficult to establish whether any observed effects are in fact a result of the Social Stories™ themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

While some successful applications have been presented in the research, Social Stories™ have not been demonstrated to be robustly effective at this point. While Social Stories™ are relatively simple to construct and implement, practitioners need to carefully evaluate whether other empirically validated interventions may represent a better option. Like all interventions with limited empirical support, there is a greater responsibility on teachers to carefully monitor the effectiveness of Social Stories™ if they are used.

THE MUSEC VERDICT:

USE WITH CAUTION

Key references may be found at:
www.musec.mq.edu.au/co_brief.aspx

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