

# Social Stories: Big Feelings & Coping

9 social stories. Read one-on-one when the student is calm, not during a hard moment. First person, positive, and true for this student.

Nine stories for the moments feelings get too big. Each one names the feeling, explains that the feeling is okay, and gives one concrete thing to do. Read them when calm so the strategy is ready before it's needed.

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## When I Feel Frustrated

Sometimes things are hard. When something is hard, I might feel frustrated.

Frustrated is a feeling. Everybody feels frustrated sometimes, even grown-ups.

When I feel frustrated, my body might feel tight or hot. That is a signal.

When I notice that signal, I can take three slow breaths.

I can also ask for help or ask for a short break.

Taking a break does not mean I am done. It means I am getting ready to try again.

My teachers are proud of me when I use my calm-down plan.

**For the adult:** Pair this with a break card the student can reach. Practise the three breaths when calm, several times, before relying on it in a hard moment.

## Taking a Break

When my feelings get big, I can take a break.

A break is a quiet time to help my body feel calm again.

I can show my break card, or I can say "I need a break."

During my break I can breathe, squeeze a fidget, or sit in the calm spot.

When I feel calmer, I come back and try again.

Taking a break is a smart choice. It helps me do my best.

**For the adult:** Decide in advance where the break happens and how long it lasts. Honour the break request every time at first, then fade the frequency.

## It's Okay to Make a Mistake

Everybody makes mistakes. Mistakes are part of learning.

When I make a mistake, I might feel embarrassed or upset. That is okay.

A mistake does not mean I am bad at something. It means I am still learning.

When I make a mistake, I can take a breath and try again.

I can say, "That's okay, I can try again."

My teachers help me. They do not expect me to be perfect.

**For the adult:** Model your own mistakes out loud ("Oops, I'll try that again") so the student sees the response normalised by an adult.

## When I Am Angry

Sometimes I feel angry. Anger is a strong feeling.

It is okay to feel angry. It is not okay to hurt myself or other people.

When I am angry, I can use my body in a safe way: push on a wall, squeeze my hands, or stomp my feet.

I can also ask for space by saying "I need space."

When my body feels calmer, I can talk about what made me angry.

Everyone feels angry sometimes. I can learn to stay safe when I do.

**For the adult:** Teach the safe physical outlet (wall push) proactively. If anger involves aggression, coordinate this story with the student's BIP.

## When Something Feels Too Loud

Sometimes a sound feels too loud for me. It might hurt my ears or make me want to cover them.

Loud sounds can happen at assemblies, in the cafeteria, or during a fire drill.

When a sound is too loud, I might feel worried or upset. That is okay.

I can use my headphones, or I can move to a quieter spot.

I can tell an adult, "It's too loud for me."

The adults will help me find a way to feel more comfortable.

**For the adult:** Have the noise-reducing headphones physically available and pre-approved. Warn the student before predictable loud events.

## Waiting Is Hard Sometimes

Sometimes I have to wait. Waiting can be hard.

I might have to wait for my turn, for lunch, or for a grown-up to finish talking.

When I wait, I might feel impatient. Lots of people feel that way.

While I wait, I can count, look at a book, or hold my fidget.

Waiting always ends. My turn will come.

When I wait calmly, I feel proud of myself.

**For the adult:** Pair with a visual timer so the wait has a visible end. Start with short waits and build up.

## When My Plans Change

Sometimes I make a plan, and then the plan changes.

The schedule might change, or we might do something different than I expected.

When plans change, I might feel surprised or upset. Change can feel hard.

When I notice the change, I can take a breath and look at my schedule.

I can ask, "What is happening now?"

Even when plans change, I am safe, and the adults are helping me.

**For the adult:** Give advance warning of changes whenever possible, using the visual schedule. This story supports, but does not replace, that warning.

## Using My Calm-Down Spot

In my classroom there is a calm-down spot. It is a place to help my body feel better.

I can go to the calm-down spot when my feelings are big.

The calm-down spot is not a punishment. It is a helpful place.

There I can breathe, use a fidget, or look at calm pictures.

When I feel ready, I leave the calm-down spot and rejoin my class.

Using the calm-down spot is a good way to take care of myself.

**For the adult:** Frame the space as a support, never a consequence. Let the student choose to use it, and teach it during calm times.

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## Naming My Feelings

I have many feelings. Feelings can be happy, sad, mad, worried, or excited.

All of my feelings are okay to have.

Sometimes it helps to name my feeling out loud or point to it on a chart.

When I name my feeling, an adult can understand and help me.

I can say, "I feel \_\_\_\_," or point to the feeling that matches.

Naming my feelings helps me feel more in control.

**For the adult:** Keep a feelings chart or 1-5 scale nearby. Naming precedes regulating — practise identifying feelings before expecting the student to manage them.

# How to Use a Social Story

A social story is not a behaviour contract. It describes a situation and a positive response, so the student knows what to expect and what to do.

## Read it before the situation, not during it

A social story works as preparation. Read it in a calm moment before the assembly, the fire drill, or the dentist visit — not in the middle of an escalation, when no new information can get in.

## Read it more than once

One reading rarely changes behaviour. Most stories need to be read daily for a week or two, then faded to before the specific event. Consistency is what makes the response automatic.

## Make it true for this student

If a line is not true — "I stay calm at the dentist" for a student who never has — change it to a goal the student can actually reach: "I am learning to stay calm at the dentist." A story the student knows is false teaches them to ignore it.

## Keep more description than direction

Research on social stories suggests most sentences should describe the situation and how others feel, with only a few telling the student what to do. A story that is all instructions reads as a lecture.

## Personalise it

Add the student's name, a photo, or the specific people and places involved. The more it looks like the student's real life, the more it transfers to real life.

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