

Social Stories: Communication & Speaking Up

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 about using words, asking for what I need, and speaking up for myself. These build the self-advocacy that matters far beyond the classroom.

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Asking for Help

Sometimes something is too hard, and I need help.

Everybody needs help sometimes. Asking for help is a smart thing to do.

When I need help, I can raise my hand or use my help card.

I can say, "Can you help me, please?"

Then I wait for the grown-up to come. Help is on the way.

Asking for help is a good way to take care of myself.

For the adult: Make the help signal (hand up or card) explicit and reinforce every use, so asking becomes easier than struggling silently.

Saying 'I Need a Break'

Sometimes my body or my brain gets tired or overwhelmed.

When that happens, I can ask for a break.

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

Asking for a break with words is better than getting upset.

A break helps me feel ready to try again.

It is okay to ask for what I need.

For the adult: This teaches a functional replacement for escape behaviour. Honour the request every time at first, then shape toward completing work.

Telling Someone I Don't Feel Well

Sometimes my body does not feel well. I might have a headache, a tummy ache, or feel tired.

When I do not feel well, I can tell a grown-up.

I can say, "I don't feel well," and point to where it hurts.

The grown-up needs to know so they can help me.

Telling someone is the right thing to do when I feel sick.

The adults at school and home want to help me feel better.

For the adult: Pair with a body-part visual so a student with limited language can point. Practise the phrase when well.

Saying 'No' Politely

Sometimes I do not want to do something, or I do not want something.

It is okay to say no. I can say no in a polite way.

I can say, "No, thank you," instead of yelling or grabbing.

Saying no politely helps other people understand me.

Sometimes I still have to do the thing, even after I say no. That is okay.

Using polite words helps people listen to me.

For the adult: Distinguish between choices where 'no' is honoured and non-negotiables. Teach polite refusal for the former.

Using My Words Instead of My Body

When I am upset, I might want to hit, push, or grab.

Using my body to show anger can hurt someone. That is not safe.

Instead, I can use my words. I can say how I feel.

I can say, "I am mad," or "I need space," or "Stop."

Using my words keeps everyone safe.

I am learning to tell people how I feel with words.

For the adult: Model and reinforce the exact replacement phrases. Coordinate with the BIP if physical behaviour is a target.

Answering a Question

Sometimes a grown-up or a friend asks me a question.

A question is when someone wants to know something from me.

I can take my time to think about my answer.

I can answer with words, by pointing, or with my device.

If I do not know the answer, I can say, "I don't know."

Answering questions is a way to share what I think.

For the adult: Give processing time — count silently to ten before repeating. Accept the student's communication mode.

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Telling a Grown-Up About a Problem

Sometimes a problem happens. Someone might be unkind, or I might get hurt or feel scared.

When there is a problem, I can tell a grown-up I trust.

Telling a grown-up is not tattling. It is asking for help with something important.

I can say, "I have a problem," and explain what happened.

The grown-up will listen and help me.

It is always okay to tell a trusted grown-up when something is wrong.

For the adult: Identify the specific trusted adults by name. Distinguish 'reporting a problem' from 'tattling' with examples.

Waiting to Talk

Sometimes I have something exciting to say.

If someone else is already talking, I wait for my turn.

Interrupting can make the other person lose their thought.

While I wait, I can hold my idea in my head or hold up one finger to show I have something to say.

When the person finishes, then I can talk.

Waiting to talk shows I respect other people.

For the adult: Give a concrete 'hold' signal (one finger up) so the urge to speak has an outlet while waiting.

Telling People What Helps Me

Everybody learns and feels comfortable in different ways.

There are things that help me do my best, like extra time, a quiet spot, or headphones.

I can tell a grown-up what helps me. This is called speaking up for myself.

I can say, "It helps me when ____."

When I tell people what helps me, they can support me better.

Knowing what helps me is a strength. I can use it my whole life.

For the adult: This is the foundation of self-advocacy — the skill that outlives the IEP. Practise the student naming one support that helps 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.

Tired of rebuilding these forms every year?

IEP Goal Writer saves each student's profile once, then generates goals, PLAAFPs, progress notes, and parent updates from the same data — free to try at iepgoalwriter.pro

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