

SOCIAL Narratives

WHY SHOULD YOU USE A SOCIAL NARRATIVE?

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder and sensory processing issues respond differently to sensory input. Everyday outings can be overwhelming due to the variety of lights, sounds, smells, etc. Families with sensory processing difficulties may experience such strong anxiety that they feel like they can't participate in certain activities or experiences.

WHAT DOES A SOCIAL NARRATIVE DO?

Social narratives, also called pre-visit stories, provide a blueprint to explain new experiences and decrease the anxiety around unfamiliar or potentially overwhelming events. The narratives highlight the parts of an experience that might be the most challenging and provide insight into what strategies individuals can use, if they start to feel overwhelmed. The stories show images of the new experience, so individuals can familiarize themselves before and feel prepared for any difficult moments.

HOW-TO GUIDE FOR CREATING SOCIAL NARRATIVES

When creating a social narrative, include logistical information like parking, entrances/exits, restrooms and food options. Then highlight any areas that might provide increased or decreased sensory stimulation or emotional intensity, such as startling moments, flashing lights, times you are expected to be quiet or moments of conflict within a play. If your organization offers accessibility accommodations, list these in the narrative, so individuals know what strategies they can use if they feel overwhelmed. Accessibility accommodations may include take-a-break spaces or sensory tool kits, special inclusive events.

Use an actual photo of each part of the story. Include a simple caption with the photo, and then describe the photo in a few sentences. This will make the narrative accessible to a wide range of learners.

Use a first-person viewpoint in your narrative. Say things like, "I will find my seat," or "We will hold hands in the parking lot," rather than using a second-person voice. Explain what will happen in a direct and descriptive way, and avoid using vague language like, "It will all be okay."

For a social narrative, you can use a story or video format. You should post the narratives on your company's website for families to view before coming to your business or organization. You should also print some copies for families to utilize at the event.

EXAMPLES

