

Social Stories for Neurodivergent People with Eating Disorders

For neurodivergent people, meals and healthcare settings, which can be full of strong and unpredictable stimuli, are often overwhelming. Social Stories offer structure that can help prepare for these situations.

What are Social Stories?

Social Stories are a learning tool developed by Carol Gray, initially for Autistic students to support them in navigating social situations. They are formatted in a predictable way to:

- Describe a situation and answer 'WH' questions (where, when, who, what, how, why)
- Offer clarity, support understanding, reduce anxiety, and encourage positive interactions

Why can Social Stories be helpful for neurodivergent people with eating disorders?

They can:

- Be used by people of all ages
- Help reduce uncertainty and unknowns before new situations
- Help with breaking down and completing tasks or achieving goals
- Increase sense of control and autonomy
- Support communication or interactions with others (especially between neurodivergent and neurotypical people!)
- Be created for yourself (as a self-support tool) *or* for someone else
- Serve a function similar to social scripting (i.e., prepared and rehearsed phrases), a strategy that can help neurodivergent people cope with uncertainty or anxiety in social scenarios
- Serve a function similar to positive affirmations, which are repeated to create a positive feedback loop and support new (positive) ways of thinking



How to build a Social Story

Disclaimer: Social Stories are a helpful tool when written using gentle, reassuring, and non-judgmental language. Some people may find it difficult to remain non-judgmental when writing a Social Story for themselves. Consider writing the Social Story as if it is for a loved one. If that still feels too challenging, ask someone you trust, like a family member or therapist, to write the Social Story with you!

Social stories should:

- Be written in **first person**
- Have only **1 or 2 sentences per page**
- **Describe** more than they direct
- Answer **'WH'** questions
- Use **kind, non-judgmental language**

Plan for 3 main parts

- 1 **Introduction** – describe the topic, situation, or goal
- 2 **Body** – add detail (based on the 'WH' questions)
- 3 **Conclusion** – reinforce and summarize information

Use 2 main types of sentences

- 1 **Descriptive** – to describe context
- 2 **Coaching** – to gently suggest and guide

Answer relevant 'WH' questions

- **Where** – place, environment
- **When** – time-related information
- **Who** – relevant people
- **What** – important cues
- **How** – basic activities, behaviours, or statements
- **Why** – reasons or rationale for the 'how'

There are lots of formatting options, including:

- Google Slides → [Social Story Template](#)
- Creating a TikTok post for yourself
- Social Stories For Autism (SOFA) App → sofa-app.org

For some neurodivergent people, writing a Social Story from scratch might feel too overwhelming — especially for those with additional mental and/or physical illnesses. If this is the case for you, artificial intelligence (AI) tools specifically designed to meet accessibility needs, such as [Goblin Tools](#), may be worth trying. If you copy the instructions in this guide along with a topic into one of these tools, it can create a Social Story for you that you might only need to edit a bit to suit your needs. There is no shame in saving your mental and physical energy for other important activities!

A few examples

From NEDIC:

- [Grocery shopping](#)
- [ARFID](#)

Other:

- [From SOFA App: Coping with the 'hot-desk' system at work](#)
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References

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For information, support, resources, and referrals, chat with us online at nedic.ca or toll-free 1-866-NEDIC-20 (416-340-4156 GTA).