

**Early Years  
Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)  
(for 0-5 year olds)**



Supporting social communication skills in  
the nursery setting  
(Conversation Partner level)

April 2020

## The Pack

This home programme pack has been designed by Speech and Language Therapists and is based on the most up-to-date research on communication development in the early years.

### How-to-use this pack

1. Take a look at the **top tip**
2. Each top tip has an **activity** idea you could try
3. Think about how you can use the top tip in other **daily routines** (e.g. snack time, playtime, bath time etc.) to increase the opportunities for your child to learn throughout their day
4. ... and finally keep it **fun** and keep it **going!**

## Tip 1: Give the language needed to play in an interactive way with friends



### Activity 1: Playtime

**You will need:** Toys that allow for sharing resources and playing together e.g. Duplo/Lego, playdough and cutters etc

- Make sure there is a need to share resources e.g. only one rolling pin

**Visual supports:** see 'social phrases' symbol cards in 'Resources' section of the pack

#### What to do:

- Before play-time, talk with the child about the different symbol cards and when they might be needed:  
e.g. When you want something someone else has you can say (show symbol): "Can I have a turn please?"  
It's nice to notice what your friends are doing, you can say (show symbol): "I like your...", or "That's great!"
- Set up a play activity with 1 or 2 other children.
- As the adult, get involved in the activity yourself and model the use of the social play phrases ; for example say 'let's swap' to one of the children and demonstrate how to swap toys.
- Model the use of the social phrases to swap, comment, request etc and use the symbols to prompt the children in the group to do the same.

#### **You could also try this tip for:**

- Cooking activities
- Gardening/planting seeds
- Doing a craft activities – cutting/sticking/drawing
- Choose a selection of highly motivating toys such as wind-up toys and sensory toys and place them on the table. The children can practise asking each other to swap, take turns etc using these toys.



## Tip 2: Use stories to support understanding of social situations and friendships



### Activity 2: Storytime

**You will need:** Children's books about friendship e.g. 'Pip and Posy' series  
- see the links below for suggestions:

<https://teachingwithchildrensbooks.com/books-about-friendship/>  
<https://ican.org.uk/shop/jake-tizzy-book-1-hello/>

**What to do:** As you share stories, keep the following tips in mind (depending on the child's level of language):

- **Label the emotions** different characters might be feeling and talk about why e.g. This boy is feeling sad because he dropped his ice cream
- **Relate stories to personal experiences:** "Can you think of a time when someone wouldn't let you play?"... "How did you feel?"
- **Own and talk about your own feelings:** e.g. "I feel sad when it's time to say goodbye"
- **Talk about possible solutions** to problems that occur e.g. "What can the boy do now?"... "he could ask his dad for a cuddle... he could ask his mum if he can have another ice cream..." etc – give time with the child to think and come up with ideas for themselves.
- **Talk about 'what ifs....'** E.g. "What would happen if the little boy snatched his friend's scooter?"

**You could also try.... WRITING 'SOCIAL STORIES'**

#### What is a social story?

Social stories are written for children to help them learn and understand social rules and cope in social situations.

- See Social Stories Information Sheet (in the Resources section of this pack)
- See [www.pinterest.com](https://www.pinterest.com) (or download the app) for examples of social stories

### **You could also try....**

- Writing social stories with an app – there are lots of apps available to do this, so you can make them really personal, including photos/ pictures to make them personal for the individual child. Here's one that's free:

<http://touchautism.com/app/social-stories-creator-library/>

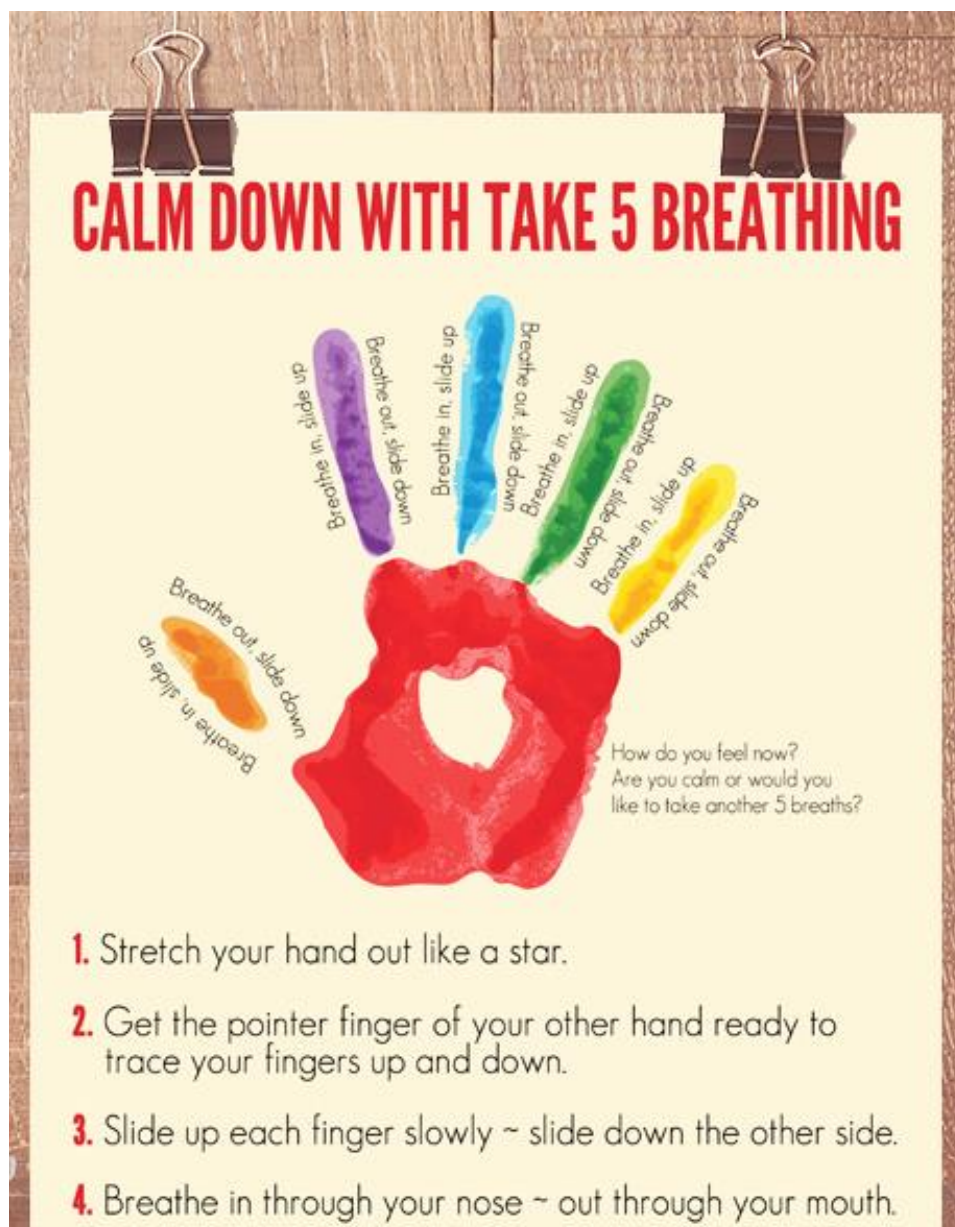
### **Books about expressing feelings**

- How Do You Feel by Anthony Browne?
- My Feelings by Sarah Jennings
- In My Heart: A Book of Feelings by Jo Witek
- Playdate Pals books
- Worried Arthur books
- Sometimes I Feel Sunny by Gillian Shields
- Everybody Feels by Moira Butterfield
- A Book of Feelings by Amanda McCardie
- How Are You Feeling Today? by Molly Potter

### Tip 3: Try out strategies to support emotional regulation

#### Activity 3: Practice calming breathing with 'Take 5' strategy

Support the child to use this breathing strategy when feeling upset/anxious.

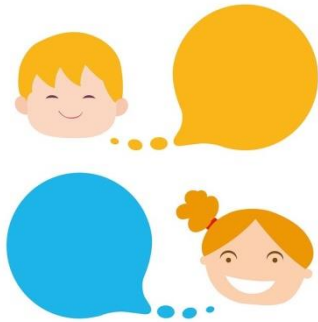


For more ideas to support emotional regulation, see the resources section of this pack: 'Helping my child to manage their emotions'

## Tip 4: Develop skills in talking about experiences and past events

### Activity 4

**Name of activity:** Sharing News – show and tell



#### You will need:

- symbols to support sharing experiences (for example 'who?', 'where?' symbols – see resources section)
- photo of an activity or experience to talk about –this could be provided from home, or a photo taken in nursery

#### What to do:

- Talk with the child about 'telling a story'... when we tell others about what we did (e.g. at the weekend/at nursery), we need to include certain information, for the story to make sense to someone who wasn't there:



who was there



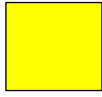
where the event (story) happened



what happened

- Provide an example yourself - show a photo (maybe n your phone) of something you did Use the symbols (who, where, what happened) to 'tell the story' in simple language, pointing to each symbol as you do so

- For example I went to the café with my sister. We drank tea and ate some cake.

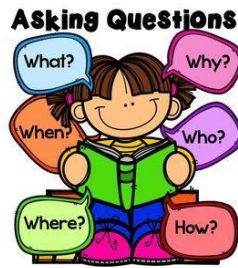


- Support the child to describe their photo of past activity – you can prompt them by asking key questions (and showing the corresponding symbols) for example
  - **Where** did you go?
  - **Who** did you go with?
  - **What** did you **do**?
- When you do this activity in a small group – you can encourage the children to ask each other questions about their photos to promote news sharing.

#### **You could try:**

- Using the additional symbols (what, when, what like) to support extending the child's language and story telling skills (depending on current language levels)
- You could do a similar activity with showing and talking about an object from home.

## Tip 5: Practise the language needed to show an interest in others and start a conversation



### Activity 5: 'WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE....?' DICE GAME

**You will need:** The pictures provided in resources section  
A large dice or cube (you could use an empty tissue box)

**What to do:**

- Stick the pictures onto the sides of a large dice/cube ( or put them in the plastic pockets in a large therapy dice if you have one)
- Children take turns to roll the dice and ask each other a question about their favourite people/things
- Children may require different levels of support, depending on their conversational skills for example
  - a) Model a whole question, based on the picture they throw on the dice: "what is your favourite food?"
  - b) Script part of a question, e.g. "What is your favourite...." and leave a gap for the child to complete
  - c) Give a question starter, e.g. "What's your....."
  - d) For children who can read, you could give any of the above in written form.

**Optional extensions:**

- when a child responds to their question, see if the child can make a comment back about their own favourite e.g.:

Q: "what's your favourite food?"

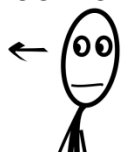
A: "My favourite food is ice-cream"

C: " I like ice-cream too" or "I don't like ice-cream" or "My favourite food is.."

**Variation:** If you don't have a large dice/don't have time to make one, just pop the pictures into a feely bag and let each child pick out a prompt picture.

**You could also try:**

- Use the **topic conversation starter cards** in the resources section (see examples below), to support the child to practise asking/answering different questions
- The child may need an adult to demonstrate how to ask and answer the question first
- The child may need prompts about body language and managing the interaction for example:
  - o Look towards the person you are asking



- o If the other child doesn't respond – say their name and ask again or speak louder
- o Show the card to your friend to help them to answer

what colour is your hair?



what pet do you have at home



## Tip 6: Provide opportunities to practice giving instructions, following instructions and asking specific questions to get information needed

### Activity 6: Barrier games



**Speakers** learn the importance of giving clear and complete information to listeners. **Listeners** learn the importance of asking questions to clarify or gain further information.

#### You will need:

- Two sets of identical building blocks – this could be e.g. wooden blocks, duplo or lego
- (Optional) a photo of the completed model you intend to make with the bricks – this can be used to support the child if they are struggling to understand or give instructions with words only – MAKE SURE THE MODEL IS SIMPLE
- A 'barrier' between the listener and speaker e.g. large book /folder so that each player cannot see what the other is doing

#### What to do:

- Decide who is going to give instructions (Speaker) and who is going to follow them (Listener)
- **The speaker** starts to make the model, telling the listener what to do with each step e.g. if making the model in the illustration above:
  1. Find two green blocks with curved ends.
  2. Put them together with the straight edges back-to-back
  3. Find a blue square block
  4. Put this on top of the green blocks to join them together etc.
- **The listener** follows the instructions given by the speaker, asking questions to clarify whether they have understood correctly – you may need to model questions or use a choice board (like the one in the resources section) to prompt your child to ask relevant questions e.g. "What colour is it?", "What size is it?", "Where does it go?", "Can you say that again please?"

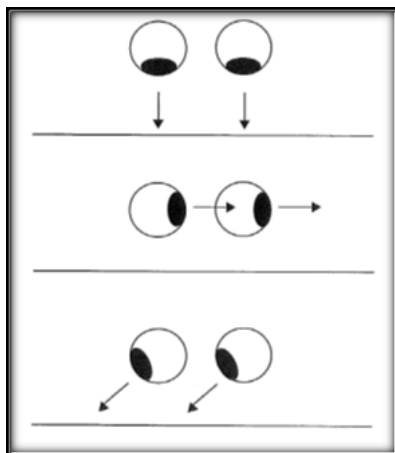
- **Continue until the models are complete**, then remove the barrier and see if they are the same! If they are not the same talk about how they are different.

**If your child is struggling at any point, use the photo to support their understanding**

**You could also try:**

A barrier game with pencil & paper/felt tip pens – the speaker draws a simple picture and tells the listener what to draw to make the pictures the same

## Tip 7: Support the child to 'tune in' to what others are thinking about and use this to predict what they might do next



### Activity 7: Thinking with your eyes

#### 1. Teach the child that “eyes are like arrows” and they point towards what people are looking at.

You could draw out pictures of eyeballs facing different Directions. Ask the child to draw in arrows pointing in the direction they are looking at. You could take it in turns to draw the eyeballs.

- Play games where the child has to figure out what you are looking at. Stare at objects around the room and see if they can identify what you are looking at (e.g. clock, table, floor, chair)
- Start by being very obvious and look at people or objects close to you.
- You could space out a number of objects on the table. Look at one and ask the child to identify where you are looking.
- Move the objects closer together to make it more difficult.

#### 2. Introduce the concept that you “think with your eyes”: explain that what you are looking at is often what you are thinking about

- e.g. my eyes are looking at the chair, I am thinking about the chair.
- e.g. I am looking at the teacher, I am thinking about the teacher.
- Play the same type of game as above but now ask the child to guess what you might be thinking about based on what you are looking at

#### 3. Introduce the concept that you can guess what people are going to do by looking at their eyes

- Stand in a circle and explain that you are going to look at the person that you are going to throw a ball too. Ask the child to look carefully for who

the ball will be thrown to next. The child can then decide who to look at and throw the ball too.

- You could also do this with asking/answering questions. Explain that you are going to ask a question and you want the person who you are looking at to answer it. Encourage the child to ask a question and to look at someone.
- You could use YouTube clips for this. For example, clips of characters from Toy Story who have large eyes. Freeze the clip and ask the child to look at the characters eyes and to say what they might be thinking about. You could also ask what the character might do next.
- Play “freeze”. Begin to walk towards somewhere and then freeze part way. Ask the child to predict what you might be doing based on where you are looking. E.g. walking over towards the sink and “freeze” (make sure your eyes are on the sink).

**For more activity ideas, see resources section of this pack**

## Websites

You may also find the following websites helpful:

- ❑ Our speech and language therapy website:  
<https://www.clch.nhs.uk/services/speech-and-language-therapy-children>
- ❑ **NSPCC's** 'Look, Say, Sing, Play' campaign' with the following link  
<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/look-say-sing-play/sign-up>
- ❑ **Vroom:** Boost your child's learning with **Vroom's** fast and fun tips to your phone or via email. <https://www.vroom.org>
- ❑ The **Hungry Little Minds** campaign provides lots of ideas that can help boost your child's learning. [www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk](http://www.hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk)
- ❑ **Local Offer website:** (search "SEND local offer with the name of your borough). This website has lots of useful information for parents about local help for children with additional education and/or health needs
- ❑ **Parent forums:** Contact for support if your child has additional education/health need
  - Parents Active (Hammersmith & Fulham) [www.parentsactive.org.uk](http://www.parentsactive.org.uk)
  - Full of Life (RBKC) [www.fulloflifekc.com](http://www.fulloflifekc.com)
  - Make it Happen (Westminster) [www.wppg.org.uk](http://www.wppg.org.uk)
- ❑ **The Communication Trust:** for what to expect at different ages  
[www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk](http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk)
- ❑ **ICAN:** a children's communication charity [www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)

## CLCH NHS Trust

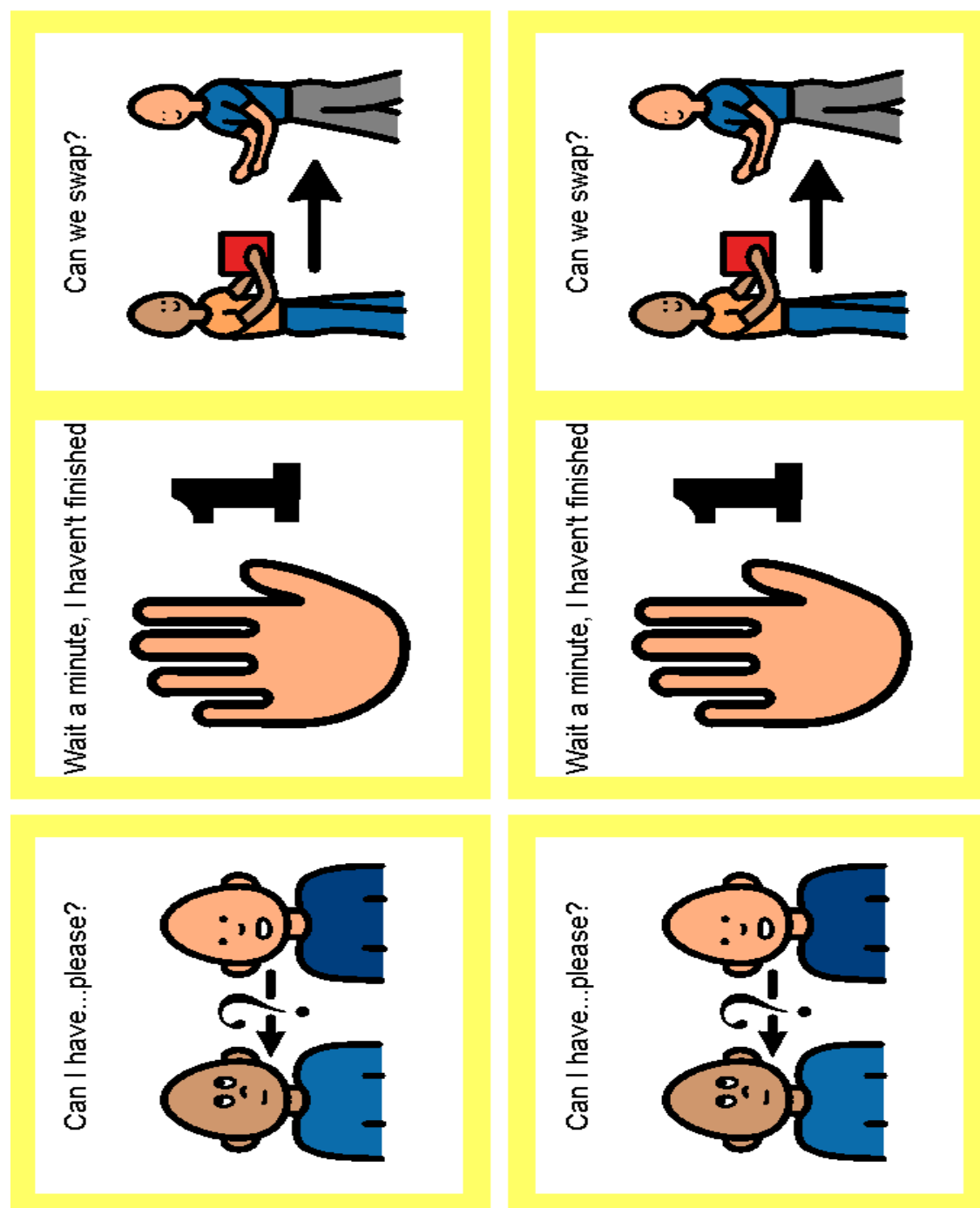
The speech and language therapy service is provided by Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust.

For more information visit [www.clch.nhs.uk](http://www.clch.nhs.uk) or call us on **020 8102 3575**

# Resources

Here you will find visuals and further information as referenced throughout the pack

## Visual cue cards for Activity 1

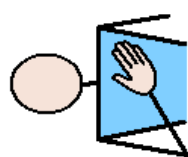


Modify this to include:

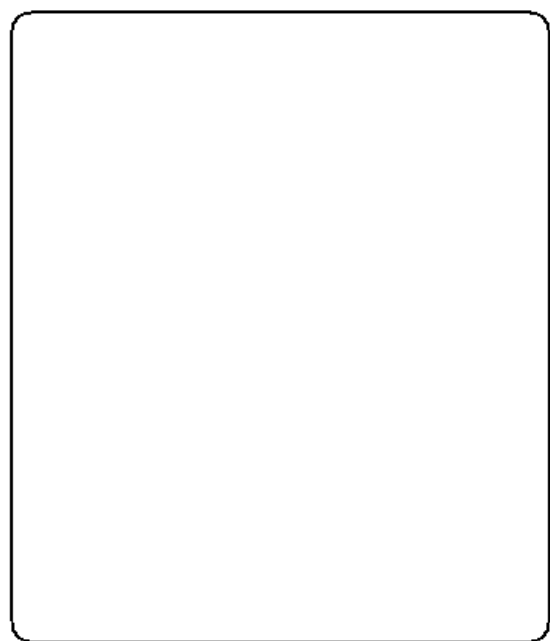
Showing: "look at this!"

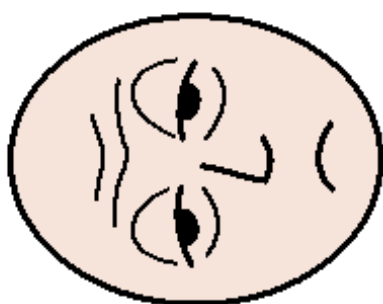
Commenting: e.g. "wow! That looks great!"

"Can I have turn please?"



How am I feeling today?

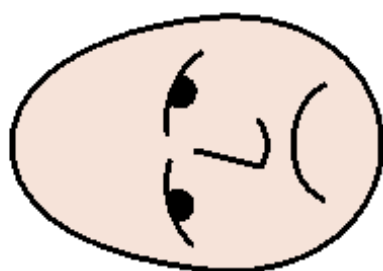




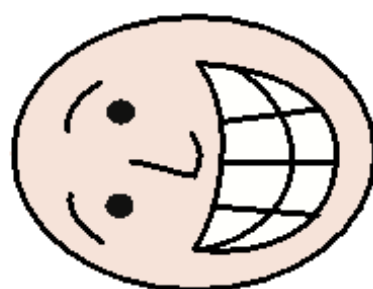
tired



worried



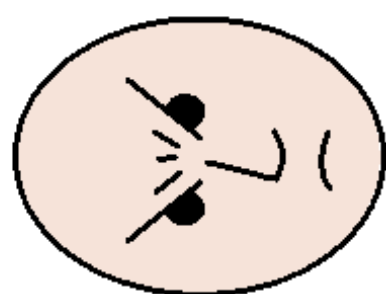
sad



excited



happy



angry

# What are Social Stories?

Social Stories were developed by Carol Gray in 1991 to assist individuals with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD) to develop greater social understanding.

A Social Story is a short description of a particular situation, event or activity, which includes specific information about what to expect in that situation and why. They can provide an individual with some idea of how others might respond in a particular situation and therefore provide a framework for appropriate behaviour.

Social Stories also enable others to see things from the perspective of the individual with ASD and why the person may appear to respond or behave in a particular way.

Social Stories have a huge range of applications including:

- To develop self-care skills (eg how to clean teeth, wash hands or get dressed), social skills (eg sharing, asking for help, saying thank you, interrupting), and academic abilities.
- To assist an individual to cope with changes to routine, and unexpected or distressing events (eg absence of teacher, moving house, thunderstorms).
- To provide positive feedback to an individual regarding an area of strength or achievement in order to develop self esteem.
- As a behavioural strategy (eg what to do when angry, how to cope with obsessions).

The following, is an example of a Social Story to assist a child's understanding of nightmares (from Carol Gray's: *The new social stories book* (1994), p21)

### ***Nightmares.***

Sometimes I may have a nightmare when I am sleeping. Nightmares are the same as a dream, but more scary.

Events in nightmares do not really happen. They are like pictures in my mind.

It is all right if I am scared. I may try telling myself it is all in my mind. It is only a dream. Adults can help children with nightmares, too. It is okay to ask an adult for help with nightmares.

When I wake up, I will see that I am all right.

### **How do Social Stories help individuals with ASD?**

- Writing a Social Story requires detailed consideration of the person's perception of a particular situation, a process which can increase our understanding and empathy and may lead to a better response to the individual with ASD (Gray, 1994).
- Social Stories present information in a literal, concrete and accurate manner, which may improve the individuals understanding of a previously difficult or ambiguous situation or activity.
- The visual presentation of Social Stories utilises the preference for visual processing experienced by many individuals with ASD.
- By providing information about what to expect in a particular situation and some guidelines for the individuals own behaviour in a format that is meaningful and relevant, Social Stories can increase structure in the individual's life and thereby reduce anxiety.
- Assist with sequencing (i.e. what comes next in series of activities) and executive functioning (i.e. planning and organising) difficulties experienced by many individuals with ASD.

### **Who can benefit from Social Stories?**

Originally designed for children at the higher functioning end of the autistic spectrum, Social Stories can also be helpful for adolescents and adults (Gray, 1994). There is research to suggest that individuals with ASD who experience greater difficulties and associated learning disabilities may also benefit from the use of Social Stories

(Swaggart, Gagnon, Jones Bock, Earles, Quinn, Smith Myles, & Simpson, 1995).

## How to write a social story

Carol Gray says you will need to [picture the goal](#), [gather information](#), and [tailor the text](#).

### PICTURE THE GOAL

Consider the social story's purpose. For example, the goal may be to teach a child to cover their mouth when coughing.

Now think about what the child needs to understand to achieve this goal. For example, they need to understand why covering their mouth when coughing is important, ie it stops germs from being spread which may make other people sick.

### GATHER INFORMATION

Collect information about the situation you want to describe in your social story. Where does the situation occur? Who is it with? How does it begin and end? How long does it last? What actually happens in the situation and why? If it is for a situation where a particular outcome is not guaranteed, use words like 'sometimes' and 'usually' in the story.

Stories should appeal to the interests of the person for whom they are written and avoid using words that may cause the person anxiety or distress. The content and presentation of social stories should be appropriate to the person's age and level of understanding. Use age-appropriate photographs, picture symbols or drawings with text to help people who have difficulty reading or for younger children.

So gather information about the person including their age, interests, attention span, level of ability and understanding.

### TAILOR THE TEXT

A social story needs to have a title, introduction, body and conclusion and should use patient and supportive language.

It should answer six questions: where, when, who, what, how and why?

It should be made up of descriptive sentences, and may also have coaching sentences. A descriptive sentence accurately describes the context, such as where the situation occurs, who is there, what happens and why, eg:

- Christmas Day is 25 December.
- Sometimes I get sick.
- My body needs food several times per day; just like a steam train needs coal to stay running.

A coaching sentence gently guides behaviour, eg:

- I will try to hold an adult's hand when crossing the road.
- It's ok to ask an adult for help with nightmares.
- When I am angry, I can take three deep breaths, go for a walk or jump on the trampoline.

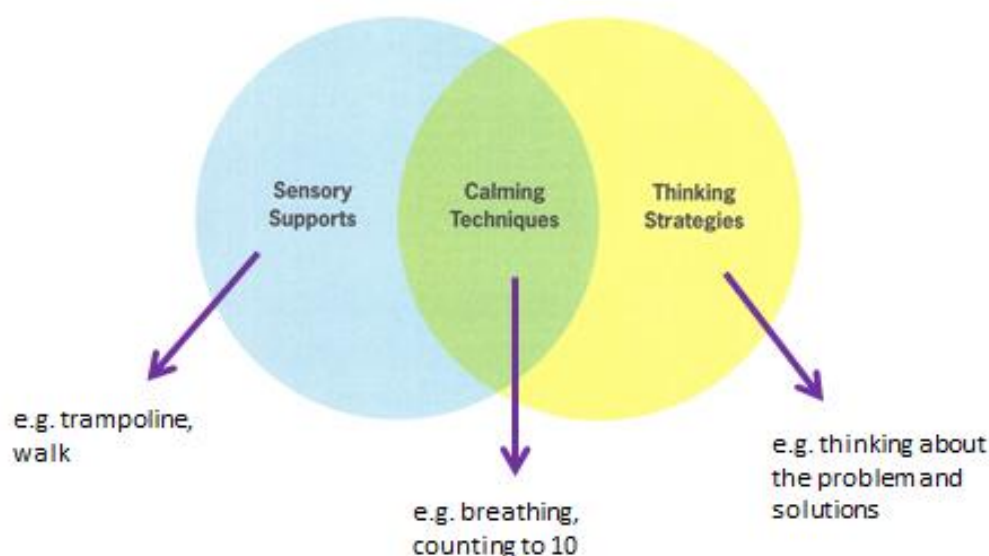
Carol Gray's [The new social story book](#), 2015

## For further information:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/about/strategies/social-stories-comic-strips.aspx>

# Helping your child to manage their emotions

We all have emotions and have to learn to express them in ways that are not harmful to ourselves or others. This can be a challenge! Below are some strategies to try out with children you are working with



Each child will have their own particular needs and preferences, so work out together which strategies work for your child. Different strategies will work in different situations. Most of us find it hard to be rational when we are upset or emotional – sensory or calming strategies are likely to work better at those times.

It can help to have **visual supports** to help your child know what to do when they are feeling emotional: e.g.

- see '**emotions keyring**' pictures (these could also be made into a poster/chart – change the strategies to reflect your child's needs / preferences)
- See '**5 point scale**' – personalise this by talking with your child about what helps them / trying things out and reflecting together – working it out together will make the strategy more effective

## Sensory Strategies:

- Bouncing on a trampoline

- Running/walking/spinning
- Having a drink

### Calming strategies:

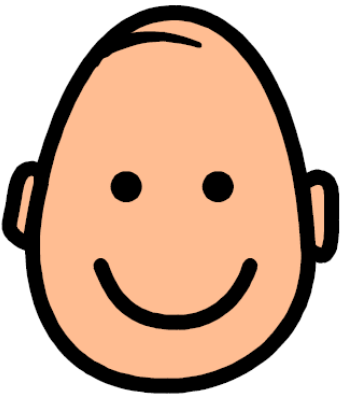

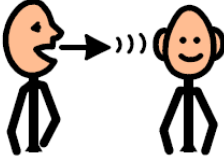


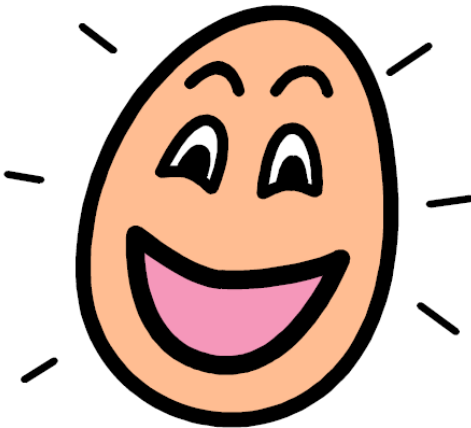

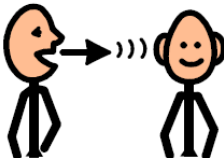


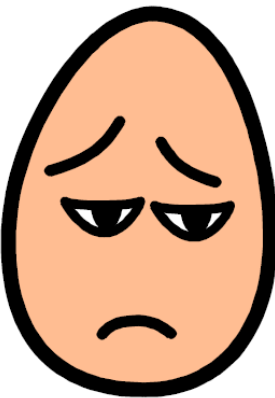




- Breathing exercises (see 'take 5' example in the resources section)
- Counting to 10
- Mindfulness for kids e.g. <https://mindful-app.com/>
- Yoga for kids – see yoga cards for kids, available from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)

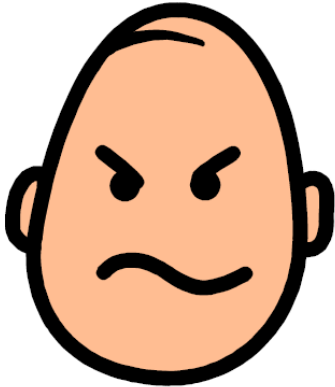

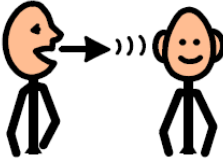







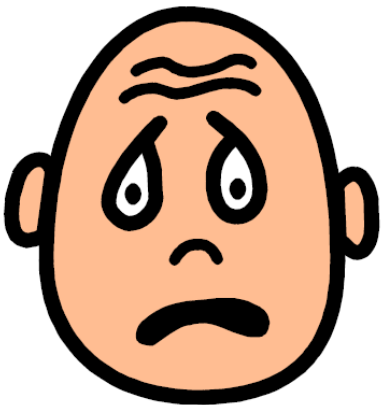
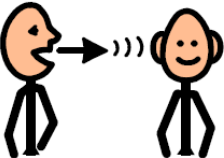



**Thinking Strategies:** help your child develop their problem-solving skills outside of






emotional situations e.g. after they have calmed down:

- See **comic-strip flow-chart**

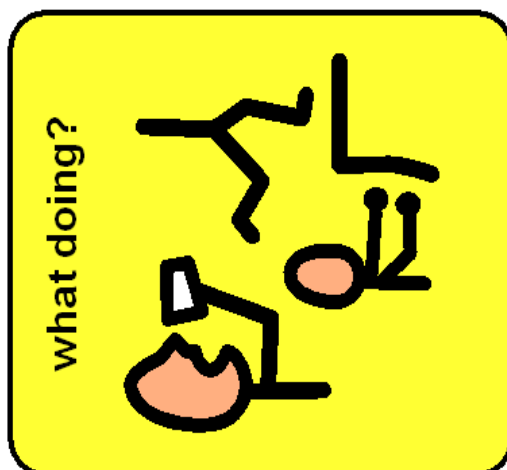
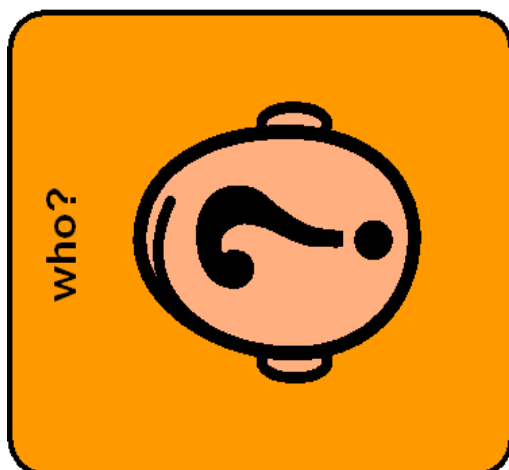
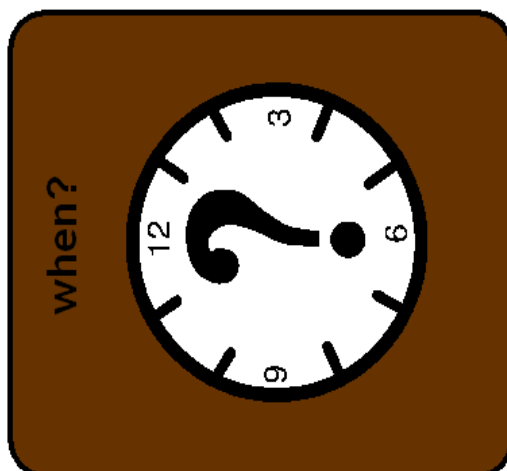
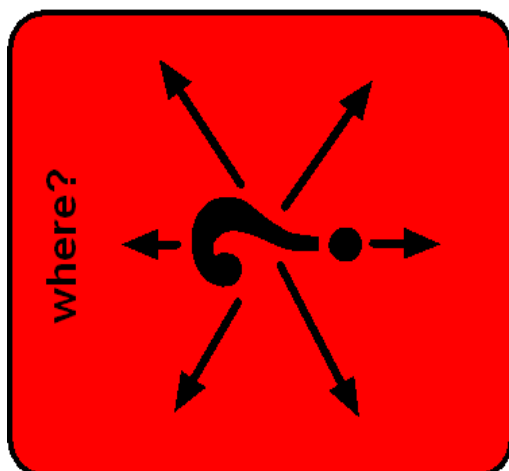
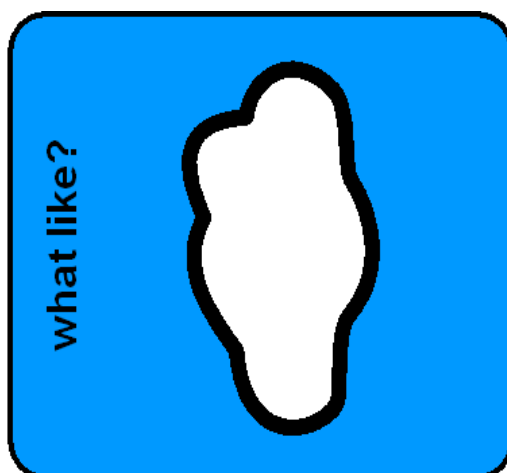


<p><i>happy</i></p> 	<div> <p><i>smile</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>talk</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>jump</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>high five</i></p>  </div>
<p><i>excited</i></p> 	<div> <p><i>smile</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>talk</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>jump</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>high five</i></p>  </div>
<p><i>sad</i></p> 	<div> <p><i>write</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>cry</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>ask for hug</i></p>  </div> <div> <p><i>take a break</i></p>  </div>

<p><i>mad</i></p> 	<p><i>squeeze hands</i>      <i>talk</i></p>   <p><i>write</i>      <i>take a break</i></p>  
<p><i>tired</i></p> 	<p><i>drink water</i>      <i>squeeze hands</i></p>   <p><i>walk</i>      <i>take a break</i></p>  
<p><i>scared</i></p> 	<p><i>talk</i>      <i>cry</i></p>   <p><i>ask for hug</i>      <i>take a break</i></p>  

Rating	Looks like	I feel like	I can....
5		Really, really angry.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Take time out (e.g. be on your own)</li> <li>○ Use 5 step breathing</li> <li>○</li> </ul>
4		Stressed out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Count back from 10</li> <li>○ Tell an adult</li> <li>○</li> </ul>
3		Starting to get quite annoyed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Count to 10.</li> <li>○ Take deep breaths.</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul>
2		Little bit irritated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ignore what others are doing.</li> <li>○</li> <li>○</li> </ul>
1		Fine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Share my toys</li> <li>○ Talk to parents, brothers, sisters</li> <li>○</li> </ul>

SYMBOLS FOR ACTIVITY 4: Sharing news



## Pictures for Activity 5: 'What's your favourite?' Dice Game:



....friend?



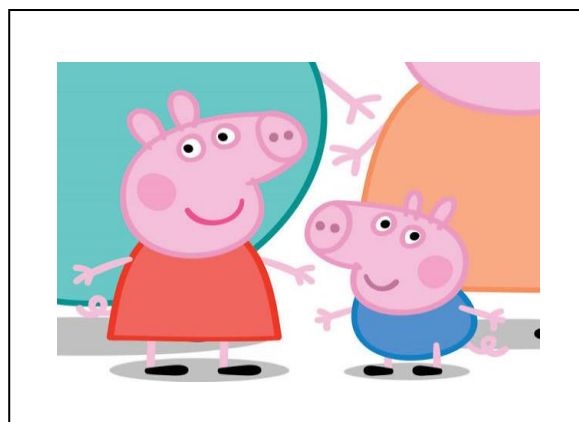
....toy?



....food?



....drink?



....TV show

## **“Thinking with Your Eyes” games**

### **The Hot Chair**

1. Group sits in a line on chairs. Place one chair at the front, facing the line. This chair is called the ‘hot chair’.
2. Choose a child to sit on the hot chair.
3. The child in the hot chair will look at the person that they want to swap chairs with. Explain to the children in the line that they need to look at the eyes of the person in the hot chair and swap chairs with them if they get eye contact.
4. When a child sees that the person in the hot chair is looking at them, they must say ‘[name] is **looking** at me, he is **thinking** that he wants to swap chairs with me’.

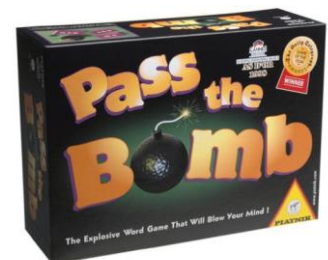


### **Throwing ball**

1. Children sit/ stand in a circle
2. A ball is thrown between the children. The child holding the ball chooses somebody to throw to. They must indicate who they are going to throw the ball to by gaining eye contact with them.
3. When a child sees that the person with the ball is looking at them, they must say ‘[name] is **looking** at me, he is **thinking** that he wants to throw the ball to me’.

### **Pass the bomb/ hot potato**

See ‘throwing ball’ game above- you can play this version using the bomb from the game ‘Pass the Bomb’ or pass a ball around and set a timer on the screen. When the bomb goes off, the child holding the bomb has to stand on one leg. If it goes off on that child again, they then have to put one hand behind their back. (Alternatively you could use the bomb going off as an end point for the game).



### **Pass the clap – easy level**

1. Children sit in a circle
2. Someone in the group starts the game by clapping a short rhythm (e.g. clapping hands/ knee, clicking, stamping feet etc). The person then thinks about another person with only their eyes. That person then copies the clapping rhythm and thinks about another person with only their eyes and so on.

Variations of pass the clap:



- Pass the animal noise
- Musical instruments – pass the sound
- Pass the action
- Pass the facial expression

### **Pass the clap – medium level**

In this version you can make it more difficult by asking the children to either change the clapping rhythm **or** adding a clap onto the pattern

e.g.

Person 1: clap clap

Person 2: clap clap, click click

Person 3: clap clap, click click, stamp feet

### **Pass the clap – hard level**

In this version, everyone in the circle copies the rhythm together. The group continue until the leader thinks about another person with only their eyes. That person then claps a new rhythm for the rest of the group to copy and so on.

This is more difficult as the children have to look at the leader to see if the rhythm is being passed onto them as well as looking at the whole group to check when the rhythm has changed.

### **Building a tower**

1. Have the bricks scattered on the table/ floor.
2. Teacher starts building a tower and then makes eye contact with a child to indicate that it is their turn to add to the tower. The child then adds a brick and makes eye contact with another child and so on.
3. When a child sees that the person is looking at them, they must say '[name] is **looking** at me, he is **thinking** that he wants me to add a brick'.

#### Variations:

- Lego
- Jenga
- Adding parts to Mr Potato Head



What socks are you wearing?



color



spots



characters



stripes



what holiday do you like best



skiing



beach holiday



camping

what play do you like best



what vegetables do you like best



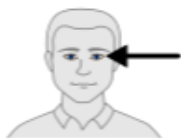


what transport do you like best



what fruit do you like best





what colour are your eyes



what icecream do you like best



what colour is your hair?



what pet do you have at home

