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Social Narratives

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What are Social Narratives?

Social narratives are popular interventions to use with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), because of the ease with which they can be implemented and the wide variety of situations and skills to which they can be applied. Social narratives describe the social expectations and hidden social rules of different situations, assisting individuals with ASD to gain the prior knowledge and skills needed to be successful in specific settings and events. In other words, social narratives help address the social skills deficits experienced by many people with ASD by providing clear guidance on how to navigate a given social situation.

What does the research say about Social Narratives?

Much of the previous research on social narratives has involved preschool or school-aged children with ASD and was implemented in school or home settings. While social narratives have been designated as an evidence-based practice (EBP; National Autism Center, 2015; National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder; 2015; Wang & Spillane, 2009), some questions still remain about the effectiveness of this intervention (Kokina & Kern, 2010; Test, Richter, Knight, & Spooner, 2011; Wang & Spillane, 2009). Although few studies have investigated the use of social narratives as a workplace intervention or within the transition process, the preliminary research results so far have been positive. Researchers have found that social narrative interventions increased work-related requests and work engagement (Bucholz, Brady, Duffy, Scott, & Kontosh, 2008), decreased staff prompting and transition time from breaks back to work, (Bucholz, Brady, Duffy, Scott, & Kontosh, 2008) and increased student knowledge of transition areas and adult outcomes (Richter & Test, 2011).

Who might benefit from a Social Narrative?

Social narratives may be helpful for individuals with ASD or other developmental disabilities who experience difficulty understanding the social rules or expectations of a particular situation or who benefit from increased predictability, especially when encountering new experiences. By explaining what needs to be done or said to be socially successful in a given setting, social narratives illuminate the hidden assumptions and rules that govern these encounters. Social narratives also act as social primers for new situations, by describing what it is likely to occur, what others will be doing, and what people typically do or say in these situations.

How can Social Narratives be used in workplace or employment training settings?

Social narratives can be used to teach a wide variety of concepts in work settings, ranging from task-specific to interpersonal skills. For instance, a social narrative might describe the procedures for greeting customers, offer options on what to do during an office party, or explain what professionalism looks like and sounds like at work. Here are two examples of how young adults with ASD have used social narratives in workplace settings to improve their work-related skills:

- Jerome's internship was in the hospital warehouse. One of his daily responsibilities was to transport deliveries from the warehouse on the ground floor of the hospital to a supply closet on a nursing unit located on the hospital's fourth floor. Jerome had difficulty finding the way on his own and required sustained staff prompting to find both the nursing unit and its supply closet. His team created a social narrative for Jerome that described the step-by-step procedures that he needed to follow to get to the fourth floor supply closet. Jerome read the social narrative each day immediately before making the delivery, and fwas able to find his way the supply closet and back to the warehouse independently, without prompting from staff.

- Sasha loved to meet new people. However, she frequently startled hospital visitors and staff alike by running toward them, standing too close, and demanding to know their names. Her team developed a treatment package, which included a social narrative, video modeling, and role plays, to help Sasha gain the skills she needed to more appropriately introduce herself to others within a business setting. Sasha's social narrative described how close she

should stand and the words she could use to introduce herself to people at work. After the intervention was implemented, Sasha's use of the inappropriate greeting decreased substantially and she began to professionally introduce herself to staff and visitors she encountered at work.

How would an employer implement a Social Narrative at work?

When considering implementing a social narrative at work, it is helpful to work collaboratively with the team supporting the individual with ASD (which might include the teacher, family members, job coach, or vocational rehabilitation counselor). First, the employer would identify the specific situation or skill that is causing difficulty for the individual. If the team agrees that the underlying difficulty might be due to a knowledge deficit - not knowing what to do in a particular context - then a social narrative might be helpful. Once the social narrative is written, it is a good idea to have other team members review it for clarity and comprehensiveness. The employer and the team should also decide when the social narrative will be read, how to cue the individual that it is time to read his/her social story, and how to check for comprehension. Asking the learner comprehension questions about the story after it is read or role playing what to do in that particular situation in real life are effective ways to gauge the learner's understanding of the skills embedded in the social narrative.

How can Social Narratives be delivered?

PowerPoint offers a simple way to format social narratives. Slide layout and printing options make it easy to create booklets that come in different sizes and use different text/photograph combinations. The booklets have the added benefits of being portable, and allowing for the inclusion of text, individualized photos, and other images within the narrative. For individuals who need assistance accessing written text, embedding audio clips in the Power Point presentation allows learners to read the narrative on their own.

The StoryKit application, available through Apple's App Store, can also be used to create and store social narratives on cell phones and i-pods. This delivery method ensures that the story is portable, and the application has options to include photographs and audio recordings. StoryKit has worked well with individuals who are emerging readers and/or who have needed to access their social narratives in different locations.

How do I learn more?

- Carol Gray Social Stories™ website: http://www.carolgraysocialstories.com

- National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder website: http://autismpdc.fpg.unc.edu/national-professional-development-center-autism-spectrum-disorder

- OCALI Autism Internet Modules website: http://222.autisminternet modules.org/

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