

Writing and Using Social Narratives





What are social narratives?

Social narratives are short stories that use text, photos, or drawings to explain situations or skills that may be confusing to a person. They usually include examples of how to respond to the situation. Social narratives can help people understand changes during unexpected events.

How do I get started?

First, pick a social situation, event, or skill you want to teach a person. This could be related to a community activity, special event, routine, or social interaction.

Next, use the table on the right to choose the visual format that best matches how the person understands information.

Examples of Different Visual Formats				
Object	Photo	Picture symbolic	Line drawings	Text
				apple
actual objects or representation	photos of real objects or activities	colored drawing	black-and-white line drawing	written words and numbers

How do I write a social narrative?

Following the steps below, write the story from the person's point of view. For example, "I will walk quietly to the exit during a fire drill."

1. Descriptive sentence	2. Directive sentence	3. Perspective sentence	4. Affirmative sentence
Provides factual, objective information without judgment or assumptions. Explain what happens, who is involved, and where it takes place.	Offer guidance on what the person should do in the situation. State it in a positive, clear, and easy-to-understand, manner.	To help the person understand different perspectives, describe the potential thoughts, feelings, or opinions of others. Describes how actions may affect others.	Emphasizes the importance of a rule or behavior.
<i>"During a fire drill, the alarm makes a loud sound, and everyone lines up and leaves the school building."</i>	<i>"When the fire alarm rings, I will listen to my teacher and follow their instructions."</i>	<i>"Fire drills can be scary. I listen to my teacher to keep everyone safe."</i>	<i>"It is important to follow directions during a fire drill."</i>

Fletcher, A., Mallory, S., & DNEA Team. (2025). *DNEA resource guide: Writing and using social narratives*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism

Additional resource guides at <https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/>.

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How do I use a social narrative?

- It is important to use social narratives as a preparation tool. Develop a routine of when you will read the social narrative with the person. Try to do it at the same time every day. If possible, review it before the target skill is used or the event occurs.
- Praise the person for reading or listening to the social narrative every time you review it.
- When the event, situation, or skill occurs, praise the person by using the language from the social narrative.
- If the person needs help doing the skills explained in the social narrative, you can prompt or model doing the skill with them.
- Adjust when, where, and how often the social narrative is read based on the person's needs.
- It is okay if a person is not successful at following the social narrative at first; make sure to still praise them for trying!

Social Narrative "Being Safe During a Fire Drill"



During a fire drill, the alarm makes a loud sound, and everyone lines up and leaves the school building. When the fire alarm rings, I will listen to my teacher and follow their instructions. Fire drills can be scary. I listen to my teacher to keep everyone safe. It is important to follow directions during a fire drill.

Resources

AFIRM Module

Sam, A., & AFIRM Team. (2015). *Social narratives*. Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, FPG Child Development Center, University of North Carolina
<http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/social-narratives>

DNEA Writing Social Narratives for Mental Health Resource Guide

CDS DNEA Team. (2024). *DNEA resource guide: Grab and go supports: Social narratives for mental health*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism
<https://www.delawareautismnetwork.org/professionals/mental-health-professionals/mental-health-crisis-resources/>

Fletcher, A., Mallory, S., & DNEA Team. (2025). *DNEA resource guide: Writing and using social narratives*. Delaware Network for Excellence in Autism

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