

***I Can!***  
***Using Social Stories***  
***to Teach Self-Regulation***  
***in the Classroom***  
(Complete Outline)

**Weekday Ministries Conference**  
**Presbytery of New Covenant**

**August 5 and 6, 2009**

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*We enjoyed sharing Social Stories with you. Please let us know how and when you use them with your children. And e-mail us with question or comments.*

*Wishing you a wonderful, peaceful year.*

*Sarah and Denise*

## I Can: Using Social Stories to Teach Self-Regulation in the Classroom

Presbytery of New Covenant/Weekday Ministries Conference

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### 1. Introduction – Who We are

- ® Denise Wilborn: currently teaching pre-k and kinder at Small Steps Nurturing Center
- ® Sarah Smith: Social and Emotional Program Coordinator at Small Steps Nurturing Center
- ® *Small Steps Nurturing Center: [www.ssnc.org](http://www.ssnc.org)*
- ® *SET for Life® (Social Emotional Tools)*
  - i. Focus on what they do know; what they can do*
  - ii. Positive language: I can*
  - iii. All behavior has meaning to children: search for the how come*
  - iv. Whatever language you use in the classroom, strive for consistency*
- ® *Example of a Social Story*
  - i. Stories are written around events, not negative behavior*
  - ii. Looking to change a small part of how they see their world and how they experience their day.*
  - iii. Topics: I Can Ride the Van*

### 2. What Social Stories Aren't

<b>Social Stories ARE NOT</b>	<b>Social Stories ARE</b>
quick fix or magic wand	a process with benefits which build over time and with repetition
external, not from outside the child; not rewards or stickers	a way to internally motivate a child to adapt or change a behavior over time and with practice; to become routine
teacher driven	child driven based on the child's social or emotional needs and developmental stage
superficial	reflective on the teacher's part
reactive	proactive
scripted	fluid and personal and dynamic universal: SEC, gender, age, and developmental

specific to one group of children	level; Helpful for children with poverty of experience and low social exposure/practice, as well as children who have ample opportunities and experiences
not behavior	event or situation
punitive; not a punishment	are very relational. Grown-up, the adult is child's trusted ally
a one time shot	students go back to them over and over; start reading their stories themselves. It's very comforting to return to their social stories. Stories can become increasingly complex as the child develops.
a waste of time	valuable time used up front to set the stage for a child's success
not short term	helping the child develop social and emotional skills she will use for a lifetime

### 3. Why we Use Social Stories - Theory

#### a. Abraham Maslow

- i. Meet the child where they are—what need has to be met?
  1. Psychological; safety; love, affection, and belonging; esteem; self-actualization
  2. Must recognize need before you can determine where the story should begin.
- ii. What happens at home matters at school
  1. Needs from home follow children to school!
  2. Communication between home and school is key. Very helpful to know what is going on at home to pinpoint cause of behavior.

#### b. Lev Vygotsky

- i. Children construct knowledge.
- ii. Development cannot be separated from its social context. For Vygotsky children construct their own understanding within a social context, influenced by present

and past social interactions. In terms of Social Stories, we might be working with a child whose past social interactions have been limited or inconsistent. AND within the social context of the classroom and relationship with the teacher, new understanding can develop

iii. Learning can lead development For Vygotsky, “development can lead learning and learning can lead development”. For Vygotsky a teacher must consider where a child is developmentally AND present information in such a way that “will lead the child to the next level of development.”(Bodrova & Leong, pp 8-13)

\*Zone of Proximal Development: “Those behaviors that are on the edge of emergence. It is defined by 2 levels. The lowest level is what the child can do independently and the **next** highest level is what the child can do with maximum assistance. (Bodrova & Leong, p 162) Social stories meet children where they are socially or emotionally and move them to their next level of development through interaction with an adult who presents new information. [Distance between a child’s “actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving” and higher level of “potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Miller, p. 377). ]

iv. Language plays a central role in mental development; Language as a cultural tool: “Speech directed outward helps us communicate with other people, and speech directed inward allows us to communicate with ourselves.” (B&L, p 95); *Teaching the child “self-talk” or private speech:* [At about age] Between age 2 and 3 thinking and speech merge (B&L p 97), children talk out loud to themselves to guide their thinking, to think through a problem, and to plan their actions. Children do not differentiate speech for themselves and speech for others... (Miller, p. 389-390); The child’s speaking is a needed part of the problem solving. Vygotsky notes: the child not only speaks about what he is doing, but that for him speech and action are one in the same. (B&L, p 98) Children become capable of thinking as they talk; A Social Story can “capture” a young child’s words for solving a social or emotional problem, allowing him to return to it as needed as he moves to the next developmental stage. By age 7, this thinking aloud becomes inner speech, used to influence their behavior and solve problems themselves. The more difficult the task the more children use inner speech. (Miller, p. 390).

### c. Ruby Payne

- i. Moving a child from casual-register discourse (home language; language among friends; limited vocabulary; goes around an issue) to formal-register discourse (complete sentences; standard grammar; vocabulary of school and work; gets directly to the point) often needs direct teaching and requires a significant relationship (Payne, pgs. 42-45)
- ii. Social Stories facilitate moving a child from casual to formal language directly connected to the situation

#### d. **Jean Piaget**

- i. children construct their own knowledge
- ii. all children move through the same stages of development, but at different times
- iii. a child often moves to the next stage of cognitive development because of a conflict – a problem she needs to solve
- iv. learning is a process of invention and discovery for a child
- v. children need time to figure things out through play
- vi. an adult – teacher- needs to gear instruction to a child’s level of development; “The educator must appreciate the extent to which children’s interests and modes of learning are different at different times.” (Crain, pg 136)
- vii. Social stories, again, need to meet children where they are; sometimes at a place of conflict where we assist them through a social or emotional problem; and give them time to practice as they move to the next stage of development

#### 4. **When to Use Social Stories**

- a. Individually, with a small group, or with a whole class
- b. Situations
  - i. To prepare for something that is **outside of routine**
    - 1. relatives coming to visit
    - 2. field trip – Giovanni and van for 1<sup>st</sup> field trip
    - 3. substitute teachers
  - ii. To prepare for something that is **stressful** (and probably also outside of routine)
    - 1. fire drills
    - 2. screenings
    - 3. illness or hospitalization

- iii. To attempt to change **undesirable behavior** that occurs in a specific situation.
  - 1. nap time
  - 2. transitions
  - 3. saying hello/goodbye
- c. Thoughtful and proactive, not reactive
  - i. Help child(ren) prepare for change of routine or stressor before it occurs whenever possible.
  - ii. Do not present social stories during an undesirable behavior or make it feel like punishment.
  - iii. Write stories one-on-one or as a class proximal to the event so the child(ren) can make a connection.

### **5. How to Write a Social Story**

- a. Start with a clearly defined situation (not just “Good Behavior at School”, but “Standing in line” or “Taking a Nap”).
- b. Choose those pieces that are most relevant/frightening to the child(ren) or most difficult that are preventing compliance.
  - i. A worry around mom being in the hospital might be knowing when they are going to see her again after visiting hours, or worrying about who will take care of them at home.
  - ii. Lining up might be hard because they don’t want to stop playing with toys, or it might feel difficult standing still and close to other children.
  - iii. For a class story about a substitute teacher, relevant pieces might be: Is this a new teacher or one we know? What parts of the day will be the same and what will be different? When will we see our teacher again?
- c. Walk through the steps involved with the child – Task analysis – how far back do we need to go? Searching for the “how come”
  - i. Get them to tell you what they know about it using active listening.
  - ii. Encourage and praise what they already know about the situation.
  - iii. Rephrase and synthesize their ideas into simple declarative sentences, “Oh, so you are saying, ‘I can keep my feet still’.”

- iv. Help story stay focused, pertaining to situation, and including all important parts.
- d. Write simple, declarative sentences about the relevant steps
- e. Include appropriate pictures. Children must be able to “read” their social stories themselves.
- f. End on a happy note (I can!)
- g. Don’t try to solve developmental issues using a social story.
  - i. i.e. You won’t get a two year old to stop tantruming using a social story.
  - ii. Go back to the cause; the “how come it’s hard”
- h. After reading the story, act it out, allowing the child(ren) to switch rolls after a while.

## **6. Modifications for Social Stories for Very Young Children**

- a. Keep the story very short.
- b. Use simple pictures and one sentence and picture per page.
- c. Use no qualifiers (like sometimes, usually, often, or maybe)
- d. Use simple, declarative sentences.

## **7. Format of Social Stories**

- a. Web for whole class or small group
- b. Class book with photos or simple drawings
- c. Individual book with photos or simple drawings

(NOTE: adult does simple drawings so child can easily “read” the pictures on his/her own)

## Bibliography

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Gray, Carol (2000). *The New Social Story Book: Illustrated Edition*. Future Horizons; ISBN: 188547766X

Miller, Patricia H. (2002). *Theories of Developmental Psychology*. New York: Worth Publishers.

Payne, Rudy K. (1996). *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. Texas: aha! Process, Inc.

White, Abbie Leigh and Gray, Carol (2002). *My Social Stories Book*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers; ISBN: 1853029505

## Children's Books to Support Self-Regulation

### ***Friendship and Respect***

*Hands!* by Virginia L. Kroll

\* *Hands Are Not for Hitting* by Martine Aggassi (also a board book)

*Hands Can* by Cheryl Willis Hudson

*How to Lose All Your Friends* by Nancy Carlson

*No No Yes Yes* by Leslie Patricelli (board book)

*Quiet LOUD* by Leslie Patricelli (board book)

*The Recess Queen* by Alexis O'Neill

*A Splendid Friend Indeed* by Suzanne Bloom

*Sometimes You Get What You Want* by Lisa Brown and Meredith Gary

\* *Teeth Are Not for Biting* by Elizabeth Verdick (board book)

\* *Words Are Not for Hurting* by Elizabeth Verdick (also a board book)

\* Free Spirit Publishing has a variety of books on social/emotional needs, all the way through the teenage years ([www.freespirit.com](http://www.freespirit.com))

**Bedtime Routines**

*Goodnight Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown

*llama llama red pajama* by Anna Dewdney

*Way Up High in a Tall Green Tree* by Valeria Petrone (great book to act out as a class)

**Feelings**

*I Am Latino, The Beauty in Me* by Sandra L. Pinkney

*I Like Myself!* by Karen Beaumont

*My Many Colored Days* by Dr. Seuss

*The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain

*When Sophie Gets Angry-Really, Really Angry...* by Molly Bang

**Hard Situations**

*Cornelius P. Mud, Are You Ready for School?* by Barney Saltzberg

*A Day With Dad* by Bo. R Holmberg

*December* by Eve Bunting

*The Grandad Tree* by Trish Cooke (death of a grandparent)

*I Don't Want to Talk About It* by Jeanie Franz Ransom (divorce)

*Mama Zooms* by Jane Cowen-Fletcher (parent in a wheelchair)

*My Baby and Me* by Lynn Reiser

*Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats

*Saying Goodbye to Lulu* by Corinne Demas (death of a pet)

*Silly Billy* by Anthony Browne (worry)

*You're Not My REAL Mother!* by Molly Friedrich