

Social Stories™ to alleviate challenging behaviour and social difficulties exhibited by children with autism spectrum disorder in mainstream schools: design of a manualised training toolkit and feasibility study for a cluster randomised controlled trial with nested qualitative and cost-effectiveness components

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Declared competing interests of authors: Resulting from this work, a manual has been written by Barry Wright and Chris Williams in conjunction with Carol Gray on the writing of Social Stories™ for children in mainstream schools in the UK.

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Plain English summary

Social Stories™ for children with autism spectrum disorder

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What was the problem/question?

Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) often struggle in social environments. A Social Story™ (Carol Gray) is a child-friendly way to help these children manage social situations.

What did we do?

We first checked the existing research on Social Stories™ to see if they were effective. We asked a group of parents/carers, teachers and young people with ASD to discuss them. We used this information to modify the intervention for use in UK schools. Finally, we researched Social Stories and checked whether or not they were acceptable to users. We gathered information to run a bigger study.

Fifty children (aged 5-15 years) with ASD from 37 schools took part. Each school was randomised to either intervention or control. In intervention schools, we trained teachers to write a Social Story around a specific goal for each child and read it with the child. Control schools read an ordinary story. Parents/carers, teachers and children filled in questionnaires about the goal, social interaction, mental health and quality of life.

What did we find?

We found that most participants enjoyed participation and reported benefits. The research was delivered efficiently within the proposed time. Information was generated about how to run a full study, what training materials families wanted and what outcomes to monitor.

What does this mean?

We showed that a larger study would be possible to run. We estimate that 180 children (plus their teachers and parents or carers) would be needed to properly test if this intervention has a positive effect for children with ASD.

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