Coronavirus (COVID-19)

For parents/carers
Using a social script to explain a new situation

What is a social script?

A social script is a clear and simple explanation of a new situation or event. Its purpose is to support a person to become familiar with this situation, and to know what to expect. A social script can help autistic people to prepare for a new situation by providing predictable information in a format that's easy for them to process.

Social scripts are most helpful when they:

- Are designed and made for the person using them.
- Describe and show new or changed activities or situations, broken down step by step.
- Clearly explain and show what to expect and do at each step, and who to talk to if you need help.
- Give options, such as who to talk to if the person shown in the social script is busy or away.

I can play in the sandpit. I can sit in the sandpit and play. I can stand next to the sandpit and play.

We may see animals at Wilsons Promontory. This is their home. I will be quiet so they feel safe. I can look at the animals and take photos.
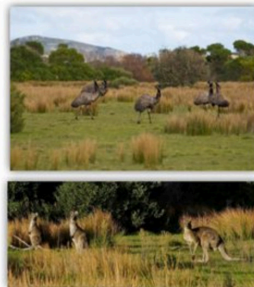
How to make a social script

Language

Social scripts use clear literal language and have a set structure.

They tend to be:

- Strength based - "I can wash hands to stay safe."
- Affirming of the emotions they describe – "I may feel sad, but I can talk to my teacher."
- Factual/descriptive - "I am going back to my school and things may be different."
- Positive in their wording – "My school will be working hard to keep me safe."

It can help to reinforce the child's control and competence if you mention skills they already possess, such as, "I know how to wash my hands properly".

Structure

You can think of a social script as a type of story. Like all stories they include a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The beginning describes the situation generally:

"On [Tuesday], children will be going back to learn at school, after learning at home for almost three months. Because the schools want to help you to stay safe, there may be some changes to the way schools look, and to what they want you to do."

The middle of the social script is where you divide the day, situation or event into steps. For each step, you say what is likely to happen, and what the person is expected to do. For example: *"You will be asked by a teacher to use hand sanitiser before you go into your classroom."*

The end of the social script sums up the main point in the middle part. This is where you say an overall statement like, *"Even though some things may be different when I go back to school, I know that my school will be working hard to keep me safe."*

Designing a social script

There are lots of ways to design a social script. For example, you could design it:

- Using a computer, for example, in a Word document.
- By hand - using paper and drawings.
- Using a photo album app on smartphone/tablet to create a slideshow-like story.
- Using an online design program like Canva, where you can arrange words and pictures.

You can choose the format that best meets your child's needs and the resources that you have.

If your child is interested… get them involved in designing the social script with you.

What type of pictures can I use in a social script?

When deciding on the type of pictures, think about the type of pictures you have available and what will suit your child's age, learning style and needs. Photos are useful when talking about specific items, actions, locations or people, such as 'my school' or 'my teacher'. Ask your child's school or teacher if they have some photos or could take some. Other options would be to take them yourself, or find similar images online (there might even be some on your school's website or Facebook page).

Some people may use image programs like BoardmakerTM, ClipArt or stock photos. These images can be helpful when photos are not available, or to keep the story more general.

Sometimes a quick sketch is the fastest and easiest way to add pictures. If your child or another family member enjoys drawing, this is a great way to get them involved.

In the example given on page 2: "You will be asked by a teacher to use hand sanitiser before you enter your classroom." You would also, try to include a picture of hand sanitiser to assist understanding of the text.

How to use a social script

Social scripts can be used in different ways depending on your child's needs. One option is for parents, teachers and support workers to read the social script to the child. Another option is for your child to read the social script. You can also combine these options so that your child gets to know the social script.

You can choose to make a copy of a social script for home and one for school. This means there is a consistent message at home and at school about the changes.

Some children and young people will use a social script for a short time, such as to manage a specific change, or for a school camp. Others may have social scripts to assist with managing emotions, or to help with social skills. They may need these for a longer period of time.

You can use a social script:

- before a new situation or event, and/or
- during the new situation or event as a reminder of what's happening.

Tips for creating a 'COVID-19 return to school' social script

Talk to your child about the return to school. Note anything that they're worried about and talk with them about what they can do to manage these worries.

Read the information from your child's school to find out about any changes to routines or environments. If changes aren't mentioned or you haven't received any information, contact your child's school and ask what will be different.

Reinforce the message that the school is doing everything they can to keep your child safe, and that they have control over many things they can do to stay safe. While social scripts are very useful tools, it is important to remember that they do not suit all autistic children. If your child doesn't find them helpful, or if they make your child more anxious, there's no need to make one.

Resources

Social scripts explaining coronavirus (COVID-19) developed by The Autism Association of Western Australia:

www.autism.org.au/coronavirus-covid-19-update

Autism Apps has user reviews of apps commonly used to support autistic people, including social script apps:

www.autismapps.org.au

The Amaze website also has some examples of social scripts:

www.amaze.org.au/training/social-scripts

Need help with the transition back to school?
Go to http://www.amaze.org.au/returntoschool2020

Amaze Autism Advisors

Contact the Amaze Autism Advisors for more information about autism, or to discuss your individual situation:

Phone: **1300 308 699**
Email: **info@amaze.org.au**
Website and webchat: **www.amaze.org.au**

This service is available from 8am to 7pm, Monday to Friday (excluding public holidays).

Victorian Department of Education learning from home advice line for parents

If you have questions about learning from home, call the advice phone line for parents on **1800 338 663**.