Information Sheet

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Creating a social script to explain the COVID-19 vaccination process

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.
- Outline different coping strategies that the person can use.

I will take a seat in the waiting room.
I need to remember not to sit too close to other people.
I will need to leave an empty seat between me and other people.

I am going to the GP clinic to get my COVID-19 vaccine.
The COVID-19 vaccine is a medicine given by a needle (injection) into my arm.
This will help to stop people catching and spreading COVID-19.
It can also stop people getting very sick from COVID-19.

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 my hands to stay safe."*
- Affirming of the emotions they describe – *"If I feel anxious about the injection, I can look away at something on the wall."*
- Factual/descriptive – "*After I have had the injection, the GP will put a band-aid and/or a cotton ball on my arm."*
- Positive in their wording – *"The doctors and nurses will be working hard to keep me safe."*

It can help to reinforce the person'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:

"I am going to the GP clinic to get my COVID-19 vaccine. The COVID-19 vaccine is a medicine given by a needle (injection) into my arm. This will help to stop people catching and spreading COVID-19."

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:

 "The GP will talk to me about the COVID-19 vaccine. The GP may ask me to sign a form. This means that I give my consent to have the vaccine. In some GP clinics, the GP will ask the nurse to give me the injection."

The end of the social script sums up the main point in the middle part. This is where you say an overall statement like:

"The GP will ask me to sit in the waiting room for 15 minutes. This is what happens after an injection. A clinic staff member will tell me when I can leave."

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 or PowerPoint 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 the autistic person's needs and the resources that you have.

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 patient, their learning style and needs. Photos are useful when talking about specific items, actions, locations or people, such as 'my GP' or 'my pharmacist'.

You may take the photos yourself or find similar images online (there might even be some on your clinic'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. For example, with the statement: *"I will be asked by a nurse to use hand sanitiser before I enter the clinic."* An appropriate image or sketch would be 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 the patient's needs. One option is for parents, teachers and support workers to read the social script to the autistic person. Some autistic people will read the social script themselves. Some autistic people may read the social script at home, or at school before attending their vaccination appointment. This means everyone is using the same language when talking vaccinations.

Some autistic people will use a social script for a short time, such as to manage a specific change, like attending a temporary vaccination clinic. 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 vaccination' social script

When considering creating a vaccination social script for autistic people, consider what information would help someone prepare for a vaccination appointment. Some examples are:

- Think about what may worry an autistic about getting the COVID-19 vaccination, such as needle phobia.
- Focus on the coping strategies people can use and the resources they can bring to their appointment. For example, bringing a support person, or using headphones to block out noise.
- Think about what someone coming to your clinic for the first time might have difficulty with. Is the clinic easy to access, what signage should they look out for when they arrive, what do they need to bring?

Need more advice? Contact Autism Connect.

Contact Autism Connect for more advice how best to provide support for autistic people with their COVID-19 vaccination.

Autism Connect is a free, national autism helpline, providing independent and expert information over phone, email and webchat.

Call 1300 308 699 or visit the website to speak to an advisor.

Resources

Amaze's COVID-19 vaccination social scripts

Amaze, in partnership with National Disability Services, have developed social scripts that outlines the process of getting a COVID-19 vaccination to autistic people.

Despite every vaccination centre location and GP clinic being different, the script's contents can be applied to any situation where someone is receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, as the process is consistent across Australia.

Victorian vaccination clinics may consider using Amaze and NDS' existing social scripts, or adapting them with photographs and descriptions that are unique to the health setting they are being used in.

What is a social script? Amaze website

This page includes a description of what social scripts are and how they are beneficial for autistic people. There are also examples of other social scripts created by Amaze.