

# TRAVEL TOOLKIT



For caregivers traveling with neurodiverse children



## SOCIAL NARRATIVES

### How can Social Narratives help?

Traveling and visiting a new place can be tough, since many things can happen that are outside of a normal routine. Creating a social narrative can help neurodiverse children and individuals prepare for changing expectations before they happen, so that they can predict what is going to happen next and learn how to adapt their behavior. This will relieve some of the anxiety of being in a new place or following a new routine.



A social narrative is a simple story that visually shows social situations and appropriate social behaviors.

A social narrative focuses on key details of a situation and shows what the appropriate or desired behavior is, what it looks like, and when the behavior should be shown.

Social narratives can be helpful for individuals impacted by developmental disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and/or those on the autism spectrum. What is considered typical or desired behavior in various situations is unique to each individual.

## Who benefits?

Social narratives can be effective tools for anyone, but they are particularly helpful for neurodiverse children and individuals.

Social narratives may help to reduce anxiety by providing examples and a roadmap for expected behaviors.



## Tips to Create an Effective Social Narrative

**Focus on answers to the most important questions.**

Provide only necessary information. Social narratives should help provide information on "who, what, when, where, and how" questions that the individual may have, such as:

- Relevant people (who);
- Important cues (what);
- Time-related information (when);
- Describing the context (where);
- Reasons behind them (why); and
- Basic activities, behaviors, or statements (how).

**Consider the individual's perspective.**

Social narratives should be written from first or second person to help the reader to better understand and connect the narrative to his or her unique situation and learning style.

**Remember that everyone communicates and understands at different levels.**

Many neurodiverse children and individuals may be able to help construct their own social narratives and should be encouraged to do so when appropriate.

**ID the reading level needed and tailor the social narrative to meet it.**

For children and individuals who need more support, identify the reading ability to tailor the narrative:

- *Pre-reader:* These individuals benefit from primarily pictures.
- *Early reader:* These individuals benefit from primarily pictures with some words
- *Reader:* These individuals benefit from a combination of words and pictures.
- *Avid reader:* These individuals may prefer words with few pictures used to show hard-to-describe skills or expectations.

**Don't overload it.**

It is easier to focus on one skill or situation for one social narrative.

**Provide visual cues.**

Include pictures from one of many, free online image or clip art libraries, or use magazines, your own photo library, or draw your own pictures. Whatever works best for the individual.

**Frame it positively.**

Describe appropriate behavior rather than framing the story on the inappropriate behavior. For example, "I get to wear my mask when we stop at a gas station, so can keep others safe and healthy!" is preferable to, "Don't take off your mask in public."

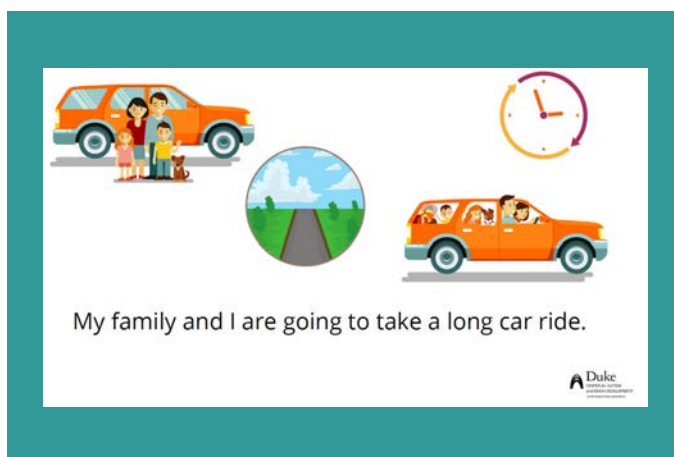
# Using a Social Narrative for Traveling

Repetition is helpful. It is helpful to read the narrative together more than once a day before the trip. For example, read through the social narrative together once in the morning and again at bedtime in the days prior to your trip, as a part of the planning process. Keep in mind that travel can be unpredictable and delays and schedule changes may happen. It may be helpful to avoid time-based information as part of the narrative, in the event of unforeseen delays.



## Resources to Create Your Own Social Narratives

Download the Duke Center for Autism and Brain Development's sample "Social Narratives for Traveling," in our Travel Toolkit found on our website at [Autismcenter.duke.edu](https://autismcenter.duke.edu). Also on our website, visit our "Resources" section for social narrative ideas and samples from educational and nonprofit organizations serving individuals with neurodiversities.



These strategies do not replace information provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For information and resources for traveling during the COVID-19 pandemic, visit [CDC.gov](https://www.cdc.gov).

Find more resources at [Autismcenter.duke.edu](https://autismcenter.duke.edu)

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