

# Horizons

HORIZONS 11 AUTUMN 2000

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the Cutting Edge of Outdoor Learning**

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- Story Telling and Our First Play
- 2 Groupwork Articles
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Real Danger



***New Ideas New Horizons***

*The Association for Outdoor Learning and The Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres*



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By Jackson B.



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# Social stories for reducing fear in the outdoors

By Lawrence Chapman and Marion Trowbridge

**This brief article will set out the concept of social stories and go on to explain their use for work out of doors. It finishes with a case study.**



**Matthew  
proudly  
displaying his  
work**

turn taking may well be affected. They often demonstrate a rather limited awareness of the intentions or moods of others and appear to have difficulty in making sense of their social environment..... some may demonstrate exceptional skills in a specific area of development, such as in music, art or mathematical calculation." Beveridge, S. 1993 pp44.

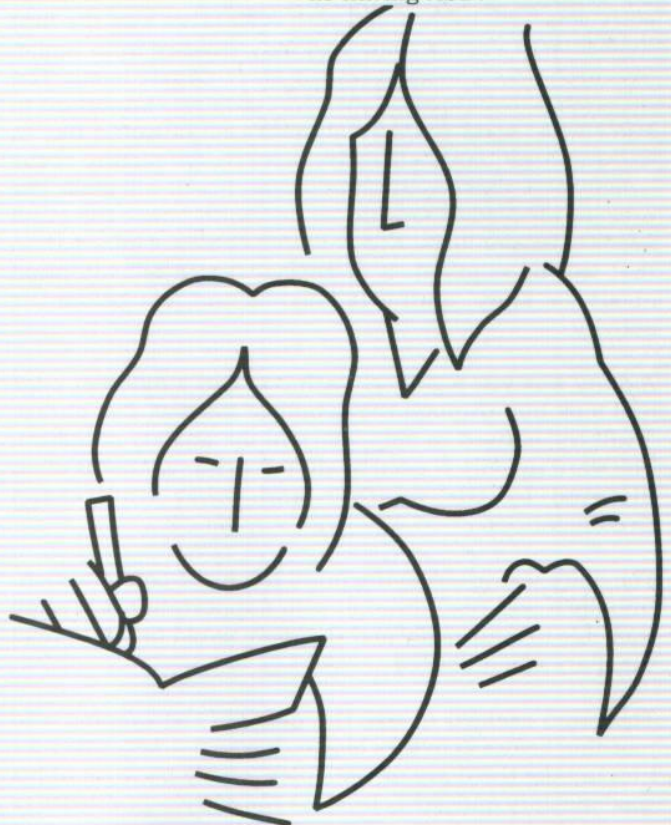
Therefore a trip away from home trying new activities will almost certainly cause concern for a pupil with ASD. The following is a case study highlighting a possible use of social stories to help reduce the stress for pupils with ASD. It is also worth noting that this strategy can also work for other pupils who are not diagnosed as having ASD.

A social story provides accurate information for everyday social situations that most of us would take for granted.

Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) are fearful of the unknown and changes to their routine. A trip or activity in the outdoors may well be new to them and is unlikely to follow a set routine. The concerns may be those we would not expect. We may be used to people being fearful about the height or capsizing etc. But for a pupil with ASD their main concern may be what will be for breakfast, or where do I put the plates after breakfast. A social story can be used to help alleviate this fear, by giving students an accurate account of what will be happening each day and subsequent days.

Autistic Spectrum Disorders cover, as the name suggests, a wide range of difficulties that includes descriptions such as "Aspergers" and "dispraxia". Generally speaking no 2 pupils display or have the same problems although similarities obviously occur. The following summary may help to complete the picture:

*"Children with autism [now referred to as ASD] are typically described as having difficulties in communication skills and social relationships, and as showing inflexibility in aspects of their behaviour which may become ritualised into fixed routines. Their speech can be echolalic (repeating what has been heard), and the use of eye contact, gestural or facial expression as well as the timing of conversational*



## An example of a clarity symbol diary

Saturday 13th May

I will try to get up at about 7.30am



I will try wash get dressed and tidy my room by 8.00am



I can have cereals and something cooked and toast for my breakfast.



After breakfast I will try and make my sandwiches for lunch.



I can have either cheese peanut butter jam or honey in them.



When I have made my packed lunch I will be told what I will need to take with me for today.



Today I am going on an all day mountain walk with my group then I will be sleeping out tonight



in a tent with my group.

### Case study

For a recent multi-activity trip to North Wales a social story was written for pupil with ASD. This was the first time this 14 year old boy had stayed away from home. Research was collected and a story constructed. The research is a vital part of the process as it is important to know what sorts of information the pupil would like to know and you must also have an accurate picture of the activity(s). Failure to conduct research well will make the process ineffective. During the research phase the pupil needs to be monitored to discover the kinds of information that will be required. It is normal not to tell the pupil about the story, until it is finished and just before the activity.

A diary was put together. Each day had a different page and took him through the details of the day. The phrase 'I will try' is used to help alleviate the anxiety of failure. The word usually is used to allow for change that is often dictated by the weather and other unforeseen circumstances.

The diary was given to the pupil the night before we left. Initially it was read through with support, but this pupil was able to read easily and therefore could be left to read the diary when needed.

The pupil seemed to use the diary in the evening and morning before activities began. It was not necessary for him to take the diary on activities, partly because of his good memory and partly because the diary contained very

little information about the activity. His main concern was the "living" arrangements.

The pupil in question seemed to find the diary useful and slept with it right next to him. At no stage did the pupil need to ask any basic questions and he seemed more settled than otherwise would have been expected.

For added clarity symbols were used to explain some of the more technical terminology. This was achieved by using 'writing with symbols 2000' by Widget.

We will certainly be exploring the use of social stories further as this one has enabled the pupil concerned to get more from the week than expected as more time could be spent on the activities. They could be used for any pupil who is fearful of the unknown or new experiences.

For further information about social stories read 'The New Social Story Book' published by Future Horizons or contact the authors at the Ashley School, Lowestoft, Suffolk, NR32 4EU. Fax: 01502 531920.  
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**Bibliography**  
Beveridge, S. (1993) *Special Educational Needs in Schools*. Routledge.