Research-Based Practice: Social Narratives

References:

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Description: Social narratives are visually presented stories that describe expectations for specific situations using language at the student's level of understanding. Examples of social narratives include Social Stories™ (Gray, 2010), comic strip conversations (Gray, 1994), or Power Cards (Gagnon, 2001).

Social Stories: Social Stories™ are individualized stories that describe a social situation from the student's perspective. The story often includes information about expected behaviors, how others feel, why the situation occurs, how others may react to the situation, and where and why the situation occurs. All stories are written in positive language and contain mostly descriptive sentences. The following is an example of a social story used to teach a student how to ask for help:

My name is James, and I am in fourth grade. I am a smart student who tries very hard with my schoolwork. Sometimes I get stuck on something and need help from my teacher. That is okay. Many students need help from the teacher. When I need help, I raise my hand quietly and wait for the teacher to come over. When the teacher comes over, I will ask for help. My teacher likes when I ask for help when I need it, so I can learn.

Social stories can be used in conjunction with a variety of other strategies to increase their benefit. Teachers can ask students comprehension questions about the stories and engage them in role plays to increase their effectiveness (Chan & O'Reilly, 2008). Video modeling can also be used with social stories to enhance learning (Sansosti & Powell-Smith, 2008). It is quite easy to use PowerPoint© to create the social story and insert pictures of the student and videos of the student or other students demonstrating the expectations. The use of prompting/fading procedures and positive reinforcement are also effective when teaching students the behaviors targeted in the social stories (Swaggart, et al., 1995). Students can also be taught to use self-monitoring strategies to record their own performance related to meeting the expectations set forth in the social stories (Thiemann & Goldstein, 2001).

Comic Strip Conversations: This refers to the use of cartoons to enhance social understanding. One example is to draw stick figures with thought bubbles to indicate what someone is thinking, often laid out in a comic strip-like format. Cartooning can be a useful strategy when working with a student with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who is unaware what someone else might be thinking due to difficulties with "theory of mind" tasks.

Power Cards: Power Cards are visual aids that incorporate a child's special interest to help promote an understanding of social situations, hidden curriculum items, routines, organizational skills and transitions. The Power Card strategy consists of a script paired with a Power Card. They are written from the perspective of a child's hero and describe how the hero solves the problem. A small card recaps how the child can use the same strategy to solve a similar problem. Here is a sample:

Sometimes Green Lantern has a hard time saving the world.
He may start to feel frustrated.
He may want to use his powers on other people when he feels frustrated.
Feeling frustrated is okay, but Green Lantern has to try to calm down.
Sometimes he asks a friend to help him.
When he tells his friend that he is frustrated, his friend tells him to take a deep breath.
Green Lantern feels better when he talks to his friend and takes a deep breath.

Recap:
When Green Lantern feels frustrated,
- *He tells someone*
- *He takes a deep breath*
- *He feels better*