

Social Narratives

Kids can struggle when there is a change to their church routine or when an unfamiliar event happens at church. Social narratives can help.

What is a Social Narrative?

Social narratives are simple visual stories that help prepare a child for social situations and change. Social narratives, sometimes called social stories, are evidence-based.

Are Social Narratives and Visual Schedules the same?

No. While, social narratives and visual schedules are both important visual supports, each has its own purpose.

The purpose of a visual schedule is to show what is going to happen in a child's daily routine. In a church setting, a visual schedule would be used to help a student get an overview of his day, or help prepare him to switch to the next activity.

The purpose of a social narrative is to help explain a social situation to a child and teach socially appropriate responses. These are often used to help people with autism or other developmental disabilities prepare for new things. They should be used before the new situation occurs and should be read with students multiple times. In a church setting, a social narrative may be used to help prepare a child to move up to the next classroom or to take communion for the first time.

What is the best way to use a social narrative for church?

The best way to use social narratives at church is for ministry leaders and families to work together. This means that if a child is preparing to do something new, like move to a new classroom, then leaders and parents should agree on what social narrative they would like to share with the child. They should also agree on a timeline for when they will start sharing it. Then parents can share at home, and ministry team members can share the same thing at church prior to the change. While, we encourage sharing the social narratives before the day of the change, it can also be helpful to go over the social narrative immediately before the change as well.

What if our situation differs from a pre-made social narrative?

It is always a good idea to adapt a pre-made social narrative to reflect your specific church and family. For example, if a narrative refers to a sanctuary as "Big Church" you can change it to "Worship Center" or whatever your church calls it. You can also add in specifics. For example, if a narrative says, "There will be decorations at VBS," you may want to say, "There will be jungle decorations at VBS. There will be vines on the walls." The important thing is that both churches and families use the same language, so that practicing the social narrative can be consistent.

Where can we find social narratives made for church?

Visit library.wonderfulworksministry.org.