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# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Sharing information through the use of a visual, social story

The [Terrace Child Development Centre](#) (TCDC) in British Columbia provides early intervention services for children with complex needs and their families. Several years ago, in an effort to ensure that families felt not only welcome, but also confident in accessing services through the centre, TCDC decided to review how information was shared with children and families leading up to their visits.

During its review, TCDC made three important observations:

1. Parents may feel anxious when first learning about their child's special needs, and sometimes are overwhelmed with the process of accessing appropriate services and support. It is important that parents feel empowered to be advocates for their children as they begin the process of intervention to ensure that their child reaches his or her potential.
2. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in referrals of children with suspected autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Knowing that children with ASD generally learn better from what they see, rather than what they hear, TCDC decided to explore visual strategies to help prepare all families for their initial visit.
3. Initial exposure to intervention services was likely to be more successful for both the child and his or her family if they were given information in advance of the first visit.

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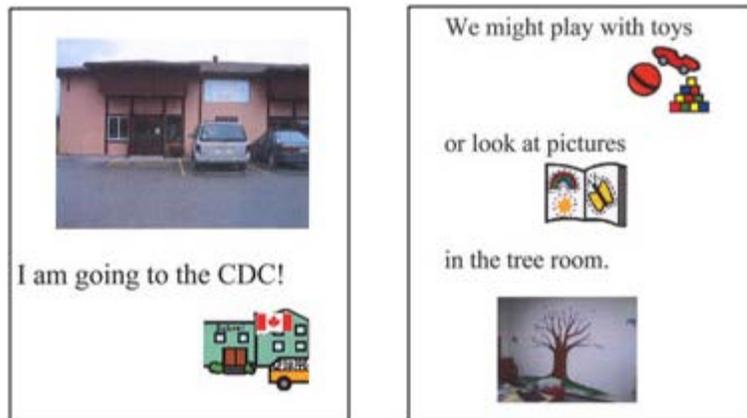
### About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service quality.

Find current and past issues of ECS Promising Practices at:  
[www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices](http://www.carf.org/ecspromisingpractices)

Issues are categorized by topic: Business Practices, Community Services, and Employment Services.

After considering these observations, TCDC decided to present the needed information in a simple, yet very effective storybook format. Coloured photographs of the facility—including of the outside of the building, entrance, waiting area, and the therapy room where the visit would take place—were combined into a story written from the perspective of the child. Details of whom the family would see and what the child would be doing were included in the story using real-life photos and colour drawings. The objective was to make details of the visit accurate but also appealing to the child and his or her family. The story was mailed to the families approximately one week prior to their visits.



*Pages from the first "I am going to the CDC!" social story mailed to children and families prior to their visit to the TCDC.*

Feedback from families about this "social story" has been extremely positive. Many parents report a significant improvement in their child's behaviour towards an unfamiliar experience when he or she knows what to expect. Parents have also expressed appreciation of the story for their own benefit. With the resounding success of the first "I am going to the CDC!" social story, several other stories have been created. Social stories to address specific issues such as referrals to the pediatrician, visits to the audiologist or dentist, and preparation for medical procedures (such as a tonsillectomy) are offered to families on a regular basis.

Community professionals have provided feedback regarding the effectiveness of social stories in preparing families for a potentially challenging experience. They report a positive impact not only on the child, but also on the comfort level of the parents and caregivers, which results in a successful experience for all. In short, sharing information using the visual strategy of social stories has resulted in a win-win situation for the child, family, and interventionists.



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In a recent survey report, CARF awarded exemplary commendation to TCDC for its efforts in sharing information about its early intervention services with families and other stakeholders, including use of the social story resource library, stating in part, "TCDC works with many families that have young children with very complex needs, which typically means they will have a wide range of support systems to access and many faces and systems to navigate to support their young child. The TCDC early intervention team recognizes the anxiety this can cause for families and the children themselves and has used its family-centred focus and creativity to help families feel more comfortable and empowered as advocates for their children."

For further information on TCDC and its social stories library, please contact Sheila Pretto, speech-language pathologist, at [spretto@terracecdc.ca](mailto:spretto@terracecdc.ca).

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