A social story is a description, often with pictures, of everyday events or activities to enable someone to know what to expect. It can give a guide to how to interact in the setting as well as outlining what might happen or what the person might experience. It should be written anew for each individual and setting.

It is important that social stories are short and to the point. Do not try to squeeze everything in – just the thing you are focusing on. The example powerpoint here talks only about what a neurodivergent child might experience in a church service at Christmas time, it does not go on to talk about the Christmas party or the Nativity Play or Seeing Santa etc. We could use a separate social story for those.

It is important that, wherever possible, the illustrations used are photographs of the actual thing the person will see. A photograph of the individual will make it more personal to them. A photo of their church will make it clear that this is the setting the social story refers to rather than any old church. A photo of the actual Christmas tree in place will be more effective than a generic one in building familiarity before the event. And it is better to use a photograph of a fidget toy they could choose to use rather than a general one that may not be accessible to them as a choice. Try to keep images clear and uncluttered if you can, and make them big enough to see.

Keep the sentences short and simple and to the point. Again make the sentences personal to the individual. For example “Alex can use ear defenders” rather than “ear defenders can be used” makes it clear that this is a strategy available to help Alex deal with excessive or distracting noises. Use a font that is large enough for the individual to read easily (even if they are not able to read yet) – if you have access to Widgit and this is something the individual is used to, it can help make the text even easier to read and understand.

The individual can read the social story with a trusted adult several times before the event to ensure they are familiar with it, and can take the social story with them to the event to help them remember the strategies in it.

This social story has been written on powerpoint and could be printed out onto paper and made into a book by stapling a corner or could be used on a tablet. You could use Word (can be tricky to manoeuvre text and images though), Publisher, Canva or anything else that allows you to combine text and images.