

## ADVICE SHEET

### **Selective Mutism**

**‘Not won’t talk, but can’t talk in certain situations’**

***“Persistent failure to speak in specific social situations despite being able to speak in other more familiar situations” DSM IV 1994***

*It is a symptom of anxiety/social phobia.*

#### **Pure Selective Mutism:**

- Discrepancy- usually between speech at home and at school/pre-school
- School Anxiety- school is perceived as an uncomfortable setting
- Persists more than 2 months

#### **Reluctant Speakers- (a form of Selective Mutism)**

This might happen as result:

- The presence of a speech and language impairment
- Anxiety within the child
- Social isolation
- Loss, death, divorce or trauma in the family
- Self-awareness of speech difficulties

It might be perpetuated by:

- Reinforcement of the mutism by increased attention & affection
- Lack of appropriate intervention of management
- Over acceptance
- Ability to successfully convey messages non-verbally

#### **Ways to Support Reluctant Speakers (Shaping technique):**

DO’s

- Encourage communications in a relaxed atmosphere
- Remove all pressure to speak....provide opportunity not expectation
- Ensure that communication is awarded rather than silence; a small thumbs up or a whispering good speaking is suggested
- Acknowledge the difficulty- say ‘I know how it feels’ or ‘you only need to speak when you are ready’ and ‘lots of other children find it hard to speak too’
- Hide your own anxiety/concerns- they will pick up on this and the difficulty can be prolonged
- Allow the child to build a special relationship with one adult;
- Try having some special time with the child playing or doing an activity without demanding speech. Follow their lead and focus of attention and show interest in it. Gradually suggest ways of developing the play or activity and encourage co-



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operative play with comments such as 'why don't we try giving all the animals a ride?' or 'I wonder which one would look nice here?' This is sometimes called Non-Directive Play Therapy

- Give the child plenty of encouragement to interact with other children
- Try some small group activities in unison, like singing, nursery rhymes, story time and counting
- Give the child little jobs to do to reduce anxiety and build confidence
- Try using puppets- sometimes children will talk to them or through them
- Encourage creative expression with painting, modelling, music & movement
- Try noisy activities such as pretending to be dragons, monsters etc.
- Accept nods/smiles at register

**DON'Ts**

- Make sure the child isn't getting too much EXTRA attention for silence
- Put the child in the spotlight or under pressure to communicate

The **Sliding-in technique** works well; this was devised by Maggie Johnson et al

**Need:**

- A conversation partner- parent, sibling, someone the child will talk in front of
- Key Worker
- Time (10 mins x 3 times a week plus planning, thinking & liaison time)
- Quiet Room

**Process:**

- Child and trusted conversational partner in quiet room do activities
- Key worker outside
- Door open
- Key worker joins activity ( avoiding eye contact initially)
- Conversational partner then reverses the process to slide out until child can speak to adult on their own

**Generalisation:**

- Selected children introduced one at a time using sliding-in technique until whole group/class can be present
- Change location to main room

**Support Agencies/Resources**

**SMIRA-** Selective Mutism Information & Research Association, Helpline- 01162127411 or [smira.leicester@ntl.com](mailto:smira.leicester@ntl.com)

**Email Chat forum-** <http://groups.yahoo.com/groups/smiratalk>

**The Selective Mutism Resource Manual- M Johnson & A Wintgens (2001)** (Speechmark Publications)

**My Friend Daniel Doesn't Talk- Sharon L Longo (2006)** (Speechmark Publications)

