

Supporting children with Selective Mutism

What is Selective Mutism?

Selective mutism is classed as an anxiety disorder where the child can speak in one situation or place but not in another. For example, they talk at home but will never speak at school.



DO NOT PUT ANY PRESSURE ON THEM TO SPEAK



ACCEPT WHATEVER FORM OF COMMUNICATION THEY USE

Strategies

- Treat the child in just the same way as the others.
- Do not put pressure on her to talk.
- Present a reassuring, smiling face – let the child know you enjoy being with her.
- Do NOT beg, bribe or challenge the child to speak.
- If the child is not speaking in a situation, treat this calmly and unemotionally and move on without making a big deal out of it.
- Avoid asking direct questions – provide opportunities for comments. “I wonder...”, “I bet...”, “I suppose...” “I guess...” are useful phrases.
- Turn your ear towards the child so that an answer can be whispered if the child prefers.
- Avoid situations where other children or adults are watching and waiting for the child to speak.
- Provide other non-verbal means of communicating, such as drawing, writing, matching, etc, but integrate these into the normal lesson so that it is not seen as a permanent alternative to speech.
- The child may be able to answer yes or no questions or using gestures or nodding to respond.
- It is likely that the child will build up from using non-verbal means, mouthing words, whispering and then begin talking. This will take time and it should go at the child’s own pace.