

Selective Mutism

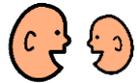
Some children find it difficult to talk in certain situations or with certain people. They may talk freely to a small number of people, and only in certain situations. These children typically can and want to talk, but feel unable to. Selective mutism – or situational mutism – can be described as a phobia of talking to certain people in certain situations. They may experience anxiety about talking in certain situations which can cause feelings of panic and may trigger a freeze response. Recognising that this is happening in response to anxiety, rather than a child being defiant or choosing not to speak, is important in order to better understand their difficulties.



See [Speech and Language UK](https://www.speechandlanguageuk.com) for more information and advice for how to help your quiet child.



How you can help:

- Be positive and encouraging. **Reassure your child** it's ok not to talk right away, they can still have fun and join in if they want to. 
- **Reduce the pressure.** Don't try to persuade your child to speak.
- **Accept all communication.** Respond to any kind of communication your child is comfortable using, this may be non-verbal communication, including gestures such as showing, pointing, nodding, etc.
- Try to reduce the number of direct questions you ask. **Make comments** that invite rather than expect a response. Try phrases such as 'I wonder...' (e.g. 'What a beautiful picture! I wonder if you've drawn Mummy...or maybe it's Daddy...').
- **Leave pauses.** If your child does not respond, or shows any signs of tension or anxiety, move on in a positive way and continue to use commentary style language (e.g. 'You've used lots of lovely colours. I love drawing with you').
- Focus on creating a positive, **relaxed environment** to develop trust.
- Help your child to feel successful and valued regardless of whether they speak or not. **Build your child's confidence** by focusing on their achievements, interests and strengths. 
- When your child does talk, do not make it a big deal. Respond warmly and naturally as you would with any child.
- Provide opportunities to take part in fun, physical activities which do not require talking but involve children moving or making noise in unison.
- Keep busy. Do not avoid situations but help your child to take part in a manageable way. Let your child know what is happening to prepare them for new events or situations.

For further information and advice:



Selective Mutism Information and Research Association
www.selectivemutism.org.uk

SMiRA
 Challenging Selective Mutism

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📍 [Shetland Speech and Language Therapy](#)

www.nhsscotland.speech-language-therapy

