



SpeechWise



What Is Selective Mutism?

Selective Mutism (also known as Situational Mutism) is an anxiety-based condition (a fear of talking). A child can speak in familiar places like at home, but is unable to speak in certain social settings like school or nursery.

A child with Selective Mutism:

- Struggles to speak in specific situations for at least one month (not including the first month of school).
- May show anxious body language, such as avoiding eye contact or smiling less.
- Does not have another condition that fully explains the difficulty speaking.



When It May Not Be Selective Mutism

A child may simply be shy or quiet if:

- They are reluctant to speak in some situations but do speak when they feel comfortable.
- They use short phrases even though they can say more.
- There is no clear pattern of where or with whom they will or won't speak.

If You Are Concerned

- Check with parents or carers. Ask whether the child speaks freely at home and in everyday places like shops or parks.
- Share your concerns with the SENCo.
- Refer to a Speech and Language Therapist. Early assessment helps identify any extra communication needs.



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How You Can Help

- **Reduce pressure:** This is essential! Let the child know you understand talking feels hard and that they can speak when they feel ready. Avoid pushing, bribing, or drawing attention to talking.
- **Use low-demand talk:** Use comments instead of questions. Examples: “That looks fun,” “I wonder what you’re drawing,” “You might like this one.” Give time for the child to respond. and allow silence.
- See ‘Commentary style talk’ handout for mc
- **Encourage other ways to communicate:** Accept nodding, pointing, gestures, or writing. Build confidence through shared activities and play.
- **Go at the child’s pace:** Start with easy comments, then choice questions, then simple closed questions. If there’s no response, move on without showing disappointment.



Key Reminder

Be **patient**, **keep expectations low**, and **enjoy spending time with them**.

Children make the most progress when they feel safe, understood, and accepted exactly as they are.

If you are worried about a child and would like further guidance, please contact us at *SpeechWise Therapy*. We’re happy to work with you to support their confidence and communication.