

Advice for Reluctant Speakers – Older Pupils

Selective Mutism is relatively rare; therefore, many teachers will never have encountered it before and may have no idea how to respond. Recognising that Selective Mutism is an anxiety response, like a phobia, may help you to better understand the pupils' difficulties. Below are some strategies that can be implemented throughout the school day

- Try to **reduce the pressure** on the pupil to talk
 - Avoid asking direct questions.
 - Instead tell them it's ok not to talk as we understand how hard it is and that we are here to help.
- Speak to the whole class about phobias and that we all have phobias of certain things e.g., spiders, the dark, balloons etc. There is no quick fix to overcoming a phobia.
- Do encourage small group activities so that the pupil feels more relaxed. Could they be the recorder for a group?
- Talk to the pupil about ways they can communicate with you. For example:
 - nodding their head yes and no,
 - keeping cards on the desk to answer yes and no,
 - Using a pass to go to the toilet.
 - Assure them that you are not going to try to make them talk but need to find ways to communicate.
 - Let him know that if they ever feel comfortable enough to talk, that would be ok too.
 - Could they email you if they have queries about their homework?
- Inform supply staff about the pupils' difficulties and always prepare them for change in timetable.
- Ensure there are enough seats in the classroom, so the pupil doesn't need to go to another room to collect a chair.
- Allow them to sit with their friend.
- Encourage talking in smaller groups instead of whole class situations
- If someone does ask the child a question and they don't answer say 'it doesn't matter if you've forgotten, never mind' or 'that's ok don't worry' and move the conversation on quickly away from the individual.
- Silence can be rewarding, so try to reward the child when they join in, in anyway.

REMEMBER: When the child does use voice, it is essential to act as if it is the most natural thing in the world.

Supporting Reluctant Speakers – Information for Parents/Carers

Selective Mutism is relatively rare and is described as a phobia to talk, that has no one cause. Recognising that Selective Mutism is an anxiety response, like a phobia, may help you to better understand your child's difficulties.

How you can help:

- Think of the reluctance to speak as a result of anxiety about speaking, rather than your child being defiant.
- Reassure your child that you know they have a lovely voice and that they find it difficult to speak in certain situations. Tell them that you understand.
- Reassure them there is no pressure to talk. Encourage other ways to communicate, particularly with less familiar people e.g., waving instead of saying hello
- Remove the pressure on yourself to make the child speak. Try not to feel worried if your child will not respond to someone; acknowledge that they find it hard at times.
- Try to help the child feel secure and accepted as they are and that in time it will get easier.
- Build confidence and reward any forms of communication, no matter how small.
- Help your child to join in and play with others, for example you could say; 'Look I think George wants you to help him build a tower.'
- Encourage your child to have play dates and reinforce activities they enjoy and are good at.
- Praise things that your child can do well, that don't involve talking.
- When the child does use voice, it is essential to act as if it is the most natural thing in the world.

Things which don't help.

- Pressuring your child to speak.
- Withholding rewards for not speaking the child wants to but can't.
- Bribing your child to talk will not help.
- Using negative labels in front of the child, for example 'he's the quiet one'. Try to discourage others from using these labels.

Further information can be found at www.smira.org.uk