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, similar to 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.

Further information can be found at [www.smira.org.uk](http://www.smira.org.uk)
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, similar to 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](http://www.smira.org.uk)