

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, 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



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, 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.

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