

## What is Selective Mutism (SM)?

Selective mutism/situational Mutism affects 1:140 children.

Some children are completely mute in many areas of their life – this is called high profile selective mutism.

Some children are able to say short sentences or answer closed questions – this is called low profile selective mutism.

Children are able to speak when in a comfortable environment with comfortable people.

Often children with Selective Mutism are very loud and confident at home.

Children with Selective mutism can often have emotional burn-outs and emotional upset at home due to

masking, ‘freezing’ and ‘shut downs’.

When the child is with certain people or in certain environments the body senses an overwhelming sense of fear and closes down. The child enters ‘Freeze’, the body can literally ‘play dead’ in order to survive. This causes anxiety and fear for children, and they often become fearful of going out as this reaction is not in their control.

## Symptoms:

Their movements get increasingly smaller.

Children can experience other symptoms: such as difficulty in toileting and eating and stomach and muscle aches.

Children do not choose to not speak.

The muscles around the face and jaw tighten causing the larynx to be unable to move. This may cause the face to become very tense.

The Vagus nerve is activated – this is the longest nerve in the body – it is responsible for fight/flight/freeze, it is also connected to the child’s digestive system, and respiratory system which are also impacted from the involuntary reaction SM causes.

Selective Mutism causes the ear to listen for predatory sounds and lots of children with SM also have auditory processing disorders and sound sensitivity.

Children require patience, time, and care.

It is important to make environments feel safe.

Without treatment and support SM can go into adult hood!

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*Selective Mutism:  
Creative  
Communications*

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## What can you do to help?

Always be patient.

Do not put pressure on someone with selective mutism to speak. Avoid eye contact where possible.

Ask family members what ways this person communicates.

Ask a parent to sit in on the class and support this young person.

Selective Mutism is a disability. This child may need help to access your class or club, eat, or use the toilet. You have a duty of care to this child.

Offer choices through pictures, or hand gestures.

Make communication fun and engaging 😊



Always try and give choices, its empowering to feel you have chosen and your choice is respected.

The register can typically be difficult for a child with selective Mutism. Try fun games instead such as the children throwing a ball to one another, or all the children calling out the names.

Please, thank you, hello and goodbye can be difficult words. As much as we want polite children, we also want happy children. It is best to try waving or using signs for these words, or just giving them a miss until the child feels comfortable.

Remember every week might be the week a child speaks to you. Please do not give up on them, it could well be the week they have been working towards and any rejection could be extremely difficult.

If a child with Selective Mutism speaks to you, please do not make a fuss. There is no need for anyone

else to know and lots of fuss, even meant positively, could have huge negative feelings for the child and they may not speak to you again.

Ask a child's parent how they like to be rewarded. Many children do not like positive or negative attention, including rewards. A simple quiet sticker or a smile goes a very long way.

Many children with Selective Mutism also have issues eating and using the toilet. Please provide food and drinks where necessary and suggest children toilet at regular intervals.

Children and adults with selective mutism often do not like to have photos taken, please ask permission and respect their choice.

There is no quick fix for Selective Mutism, tiny steps are the key and sometimes they are too big, always think how you can make things smaller and easier to accomplish.

You could be the first person this child speaks too, be friendly, be fun and let that interaction be positive.

Build trust, have fun. SM kids are still kids and love to have to have giggle

