

Selective communicators

People who are selective communicators are unable to speak in certain social situations, typically in school, at nursery, or in public.



Remember that selective mutism is a phobia not a choice.

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TOP TIPS

- Remember this is a phobia – ensure *everybody* treats it with sensitivity
- Comment positively on a child's achievements, avoiding direct questions
- Don't try to "trick" a child into talking
- Provide continuity of staff where possible
- Use a visual system for essential communication
- Provide a calm friendly response to spontaneous speech rather than an overwhelming reaction
- Avoid giving the child *extra* attention for not talking and never say "*Rachel doesn't talk*".

More information

What can you do to help a selective communicator?

- Remove *pressure* to talk, whilst maintaining *opportunities* to talk.
- Acknowledge the child's anxiety about talking.
- Always engage the child in decisions about making changes that will affect them.
- Reassure the child that you won't ask them to talk until they are ready.
- Avoid talking to professionals about the child's talking in front of them.
- Comment to the child rather than ask questions.
- Allow the child to communicate in other ways without talking, e.g. using actions or pictures.
- Identify a keyworker to build a relationship.
- Use talking maps to show where and with whom the child is happy to talk.
- Follow a recommended programme to reduce anxiety about talking: The Selective Mutism Resource Manual (2nd edition).

For more information:

www.selectivemutism.org.uk

The Selective Mutism Resource Manual (2nd edition), 2016, Maggie Johnson & Alison Wintgens, Speechmark Publishing

