



## Situational/Selective Mutism

► Presented by:  
Danielle Cottam Speech Pathologist

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Agenda

- What is Selective Mutism and what causes it
- How to differentiate SM from shyness and other conditions
- Strategies and games for therapy sessions.
- Typical therapy approaches and supports to seek

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What Makes You Less Likely to Speak in Certain Situations?



Photo by Júnior Ferreira on Unsplash




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **What Makes Me Less Likely to Speak Sometimes?**

- I'm worried I will say the wrong thing
- I'm not confident with the topic
- I don't want to get involved
- I'm too tired to speak
- I'm feeling too emotional
- Someone has annoyed me and I don't feel like talking to them
- I'm embarrassed about my speech
- I can't think of anything to say
- I don't want to look stupid
- No matter how much I want to talk the words won't come out, it's like they are stuck in my throat

Activity taken from Maggie Johnson training 2022.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Children with SM**

- Want to speak but are unable to – it is not a choice
- Have a clear discrepancy in their ability to speak in some environments vs others
- Are afraid of others hearing their voice and/or consequences of not speaking
- Can be hyper-vigilant and wary of getting things wrong or situations that trigger fear
- Can have anxiety that extends beyond just speaking e.g. writing, eating, sleeping, independence
- Silence is compounding and impacts peer interactions, achievements and self-esteem

SM looks very different in different children. There is a large variety in:

- Levels of social comfort
- Level of non – verbal communication
- Levels of verbal communication
- Who a child can talk to
- Where a child can talk




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### **Hallmarks Unique to SM**

- ▶ A consistent pattern of not speaking.
- ▶ Unable to do a preferred verbal activity with someone they know well.
- ▶ A sudden cessation of speech or lowering voice as someone from outside their comfort zone approaches.
- ▶ A frozen facial expression when they sense expectation to speak.
- ▶ A report that they want to speak but cant – something is stuck in their throat.
- ▶ Complete silence with some people – unable to vocalise at all.




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Prevalence and Population

- Prevalence ranges according to age and studies – 1 in 1000 to 1 in 140.

### Profile:

- Onset – 3–5 years of age.
- More prevalent in multilingual families
- More common in girls (2:1)
- Speech and language delay/disorder common in up to ½ population.
- Discrepancy in behaviour at home vs education/care settings

Children do NOT grow out of SM




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Assessment

### Standard Assessment

- Case History
- SMQ or Frankfurt Scale for the Assessment of Selective Mutism
- School/home reports of speaking patterns
- Communication skills screen and general learning levels – academic and health reports

### Extended Assessment

- In depth language assessment
- Functional assessment (COPM), Sensory Profile, Motor Assessment
- Emotions/behaviour
- Cognitive assessment
- Visual representations – drawings, talking map, scaling




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Differential Diagnosis

SM	Shyness	Autism	Social Anxiety Disorder
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Freeze/intense fear</li> <li>Invisible threshold for speaking</li> <li>Two different personalities</li> <li>Pattern of speaking is person dependent</li> <li>Automatic/phobic response without conscious thought</li> <li>Fear of the "act" of speaking</li> <li>Commonly associated with social anxiety.</li> <li>Complex mental health/anxiety disorder</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tend to warm up to talking</li> <li>Not impacting day-to-day functioning</li> <li>Generally able to speak verbally with those they know well.</li> <li>Personality trait</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Amount of speech related to individual communicative profile - variable according to topic, speaker skills, processing skills, sensory or emotional overload</li> <li>Maybe more able to speak about topic of interest</li> <li>Can co-occur with SM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More generalised anxiety with non-speech tasks</li> <li>Fear of being negatively judged that is out of proportion with reality</li> <li>Fear the consequences of speaking</li> <li>Commonly co-occurs with SM</li> </ul>




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Low Profile Selective Mutism: What it looks like

- Infrequently initiate speech and unable to engage in reciprocal conversations except with close family/friends.
- Pattern of minimal responses e.g. single words, short phrases often at lower volume/with less eye contact.
- Strong desire to be compliant, fearful of getting things wrong/making mistakes.
- Maybe able to be pressured into speaking despite still feeling uncomfortable.
- Considered shy, then develops into high profile SM over time. (DSM-5, 2013)




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### Selective Mutism as a phobia

When a person has a phobia, a trigger causes a physiological reaction in the body known as the fight/flight/freeze response. It can be useful to understand SM in the same way, with the 'trigger' being the perceived expectation to talk.

- Phobias can be overcome
- Phobias are common and nothing to be ashamed of e.g. lifts, heights, cheese
- Applying pressure makes phobias worse
- Facing fears (and doing it anyway) helps success
- Avoidance is not an option
- It takes courage to face a phobia




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Intervention Focus

- ▶ Share information – create understanding of the fear basis
- ▶ Target maintaining factors in the environment
- ▶ Small steps programme (informal and/or formal)
- ▶ Multidisciplinary referrals
- ▶ Wider emotional and social supports




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## OT Supports

- ▶ Regulation – interoception, linking feelings and emotions, tools
- ▶ Retained primitive reflexes
- ▶ Sensory needs
- ▶ Emotion coaching
- ▶ Accommodations and equipment – home/school
- ▶ Toileting
- ▶ Sleep
- ▶ DIR Floortime
- ▶ Task Analysis – small steps
- ▶ Graded exposure




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Strategies for therapy sessions

Try	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish rapport first – use their interests and humour to develop a special relationship.</li> <li>• Reassure them that they will not need to speak with you until they feel ready to.</li> <li>• Accept non verbal means of commenting and making requests</li> <li>• Change questions so that they can be answered with non verbals/visuals.</li> <li>• Avert eye gaze and brush over social conventions – hello/goodbye, manners – continue to greet and move on.</li> <li>• Anticipate requests so that the child doesn't need to ask e.g. drinks, toilet, need for help.</li> <li>• Visit the child at home first.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting the child on the spot to answer questions.</li> <li>• Discuss the non-speaking with parent in front of the child.</li> <li>• Confuse a stern or aloof look with glaring/disinterest.</li> <li>• Ask them why they are not speaking.</li> <li>• Beg, bribe or trick the child into speaking.</li> <li>• Work on eye contact as a goal.</li> <li>• Penalise the child for not speaking or speaking too quietly.</li> <li>• Prompt social conventions "hello/goodbye/please/thank you".</li> <li>• Make a big fuss when the child does speak.</li> </ul>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Strategies for therapy sessions

Try	Avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use commentary style speech and rhetorical questions I wonder if ..... (choices). "that's a big tower isn't it", "I like how you have...", "we always do this don't we"</li> <li>• Use humour – make mistakes and show that it's ok</li> <li>• Encourage speaking through a peer/parent – "tell mum which one you like the best and I'll come back in a minute"; "Mum could you ask Jonny which character he likes best".</li> <li>• Use movement – obstacle courses, treasure hunts, movement games – Red Light Green Light, What Time is it Mr Wolf.</li> </ul> <p>Visit the child at home first.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take it personally if the child can't answer.</li> <li>• Be surprised if the child looks confused or perseverates.</li> <li>• Jump into spoken activities without warm up time.</li> <li>• Expect the child to stretch speaking to others in the absence of graded exposure.</li> <li>• Change more than one thing at a time e.g., person, place, activity.</li> </ul>

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Informal SLIDING IN – simple

- 3 x 15 minute sessions per week
- In a quiet location where you won't be disturbed
- A talking partner (usually a parent/person that the child with SM can talk very comfortably with plays a game/does an enjoyable and fun activity which requires speaking. For example, reading/guess who/spot it/top trumps
- As they play, a friend/teacher/staff member/family/family friend approach very gradually. Initially just popping their head round the door and gradually moving closer but not paying attention to the game, then paying attention and finally joining in. If the child seems anxious or stops talking, take a step back. This process can take one session or many weeks.
- Once the child is happily playing the game with the new person, gradually slide the talking partner out.
- Then generalise to other activities/people/locations/ group size. It is essential to only change only one variable at a time and to go at the child's pace.

1  
7

Selective Mutism Support Adelaide

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Formal Sliding-In™ Programmes

- ▶ **Logistics**
  - Identify a consistent key worker
  - Little and often is best
  - Start in the child's comfort zone – home or quiet area and with a familiar adult (may need door closed)
  - Change only one variable at a time
  - Child is involved in selecting the steps
- ▶ **Activities**
  - Child's favourites
  - Video
  - Games with a visual focus, predictable sequence or motor action
  - Speaking activities that gradually increase in communication load
- ▶ **Communication Load**
  - Low – rote language, factual, structured, 1:1, in unison
  - High – open ended, opinions, conversational, initiating, audience




---

---

---


---

---


---

---

---



**SELECTIVE MUTISM  
SUPPORT RESOURCES**  
*Helping every child  
have a voice*



## Games

- Non- verbal – crocodile game, snap, Spot It, orchard games e.g., shopping game, jigsaws
- Verbal: Battleships, Go fish, Uno, Taco, Cat, Goat, Cheese, Pizza, Avocado Smash, Headbandz, Hangman, hotter/colder
- Increasing verbal: Barrier games, favourites game, Guess Who

---

---

---

---


---

---

---

---

only move on when they participate and respond



**Question sequence**

Chatty comments with rhetorical questions that need no answer (eg 'This is fun, isn't it!', 'I wonder what this is?')

'Show me'/'Which one?' requests that can be answered by pointing

'Yes/no' questions that can be answered by nodding or shaking the head


'X or Y?' questions that can be answered with one word

Simple questions that can be answered with one word

Factual questions that can be answered with a phrase


Leave open-ended and non-factual questions until later (eg 'How's it going?', 'Why did you do that?', 'What do you think?')

**Note: comments always outweigh questions!**



pull back if they freeze

Taken from SMRM Johnson and Wintgins, 2020



---

---

---


---


---

---

---


---



[Shop](#)
[Contact](#)


## School Training Webinar

Home / Selective Mutism / SELECTIVE MUTISM AND SPEECH CONFIDENCE DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN – 1 HOUR INFORMATION AND STRATEGY SESSION FOR STAFF AND PARENTS



**SELECTIVE MUTISM AND SPEECH CONFIDENCE DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN – 1 HOUR INFORMATION AND STRATEGY SESSION FOR STAFF AND PARENTS.**

**\$193.99**

WEBINAR RECORDING - SELECTIVE MUTISM AND SPEECH CONFIDENCE DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN - 1 HOUR INFORMATION AND STRATEGY SESSION FOR STAFF AND PARENTS.

Following payment at the link below you will receive a link to watch the recording via email. This link remains active for 4 weeks. Limited time only - Special offer price \$193.99

1

[Add to cart](#)

[SELECTIVE MUTISM AND SPEECH CONFIDENCE DIFFICULTIES IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN – 1 HOUR INFORMATION AND STRATEGY SESSION FOR STAFF AND PARENTS.](#) | [Selective Mutism WA](#)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The SMWA Handout Pack

- ▶ This 13 handout pack provides the key ingredients for getting started with a programme targeting speech confidence skills. Each handout is a resource within itself and can be shared with teaching staff, therapists and family members alike to give them easily digestible information on the key strategies that your child needs.

The handouts include:

- Selective Mutism summary and Do's and Don'ts
- Assessment forms including comfort logs and confident speaking log
- General Guidelines for Sliding-in (*Johnson and Wintgins, 2016*)
- Goal hierarchy examples for informal and formal Sliding-in (*Johnson and Wintgins, 2016*)
- Selective Mutism Therapy Games
- Reward Ladder and Ideas
- Talking to a child about their speech anxiety
- Transition Planning

- ▶ To purchase this handout pack for only \$20.00 AUD follow the link [Order forms and handouts | selective-mutism-wa \(selectivemutismwa.com\)](#)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Useful Resources

The Selective Mutism Resource Manual (Johnson and Wintgins) Speechmark Publishing 2016 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

[Information for Professionals - SMIRA \(selectivemutism.org.uk\)](#) – The Sliding-In technique and progress charts

[Trainings/Webinars | selective-mutism-wa \(selectivemutismwa.com\)](#) – FREE 15 minute information session

[Order forms and handouts | selective-mutism-wa \(selectivemutismwa.com\)](#) – FREE Do's and Don't Handout and The Getting Started Handout Pack.

My Friend Daniel Doesn't Talk (Longon), My Name is Eliza and I Don't Speak at School (Lucy Nathenson)

[Situational / Selective Mutism - Autism Understood](#)

[www.selectivemutismwa.com](http://www.selectivemutismwa.com)

The Activ Library WA




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---