Children who worry about speaking in certain situations

Information for parents and carers

For more information, please contact Speech & Language Therapy on:

For York and Selby Area: 01904 726599
For Scarborough Whitby, Ryedale Area: 01904 724366
'Doing and saying the right things'

- Acknowledge your child’s fear of talking and say we all have something that worries us at times.

- Say you know it can be tricky at times to talk, but that it will get easier (no time pressures though, like ‘when you get to big school’ etc)

- Don’t bribe your child to speak, or push them by saying “unless you speak, you won’t be able to…."

- Don’t ask your child why s/he doesn’t speak at times; it’s impossible to explain.

- Don’t ask your child to ‘talk in school today’, ‘Just talk to…’ ‘Say bye’ ‘Say thank you’ etc.

- Remember that your child may speak at times, but this may be outside of their comfort zone.

- Try to appear calm about your child’s worries about talking. Acknowledge it, but in a non-judgemental way, e.g. “It’s a bit hard…it’ll get easier”.

- Always talk about the fear of talking in terms of it going at some point e.g. if you meet someone in the street, don’t explain your child’s silence as ‘shyness’ (this is a personality type that doesn’t generally go/change), say “Ah, s/he’s just a bit worried about talking to people at the moment”

- Let your child ‘warm up’ in a situation in their own time.
  - Don’t make a conscious effort to ‘get them to join in’.
  - Don’t ask them to ‘Say about…’ ‘Tell…’ or answer questions.
  - There may be a temptation to ‘get him/her to talk’, but this is likely to have the opposite effect.

- Be aware that ‘knock on’ behaviours can happen once the child is somewhere they can talk easily. They may be very loud, bossy, cross, or very subdued…….Acknowledge their struggles in the day, e.g. “It must be hard not being able to talk at school, it must make you quite cross at times”. Physical activities can help release pent up pressures.

Speech and Language Therapy: Parents advice, children who worry about talking
- Make sure family and friends know about your child’s fear of talking and that they’re not being stubborn or exercising ‘control’. Say something like, “Gemma is getting used to people here… she will talk when she’s ready”

- Well meaning people can decide they’ll, ‘get her talking’ and ask lots of questions! Advise them to talk, but not ask questions. It’s difficult!

- When/if your child talks make sure everyone knows to continue the talking/conversation, but not make a big thing of it. No big rewards, applause etc!

- If your child wants to whisper into your ear, take them away to where they can speak normally.

- Wait before answering for your child; it may seem like a long time but wait 5 seconds if e.g. someone asks your child something, e.g. “Where did you go on holiday?”, s/he may respond within that time, if not give a choice and say to your child e.g. “Did we go to Spain or France?” If s/he still can’t answer just say “Never mind for now we can find out another time” and move the conversation on by asking the person a question yourself.

- Allow your child to speak through you, using a normal voice though if s/he, if s/he finds that possible when in public. Don’t dip your head down just see if s/he can talk to you rather than to the other person directly.

- Say that others understand that s/he is finding it hard to talk at the moment e.g. “Grandma knows it’s still tricky to talk to her, but that you’re able to talk to me when she’s around” or

- “I know it’s easier for you when everyone is counting at the same time”. Make sure your child knows you understand the boundaries on their speaking confidence.

- Try not to join your child in their anxieties, but look for solutions or help them re-frame their thinking. Acknowledge their worry then move the conversation on. Other agencies can be helpful here for ‘how to deal with worries’ e.g. a family support worker.
• If your child doesn’t feel able to do something e.g. attend a party, just do part of it, e.g. just take a present to the party, rather than stay.

• If your child whispers to you when talking when other people are around, try not to lean down or whisper yourself. Stand between your child and the other person and ask your child to speak again. If this doesn’t work, move as far away as you need to for your child to use a voice, even if it is a quiet voice.

• Don’t correct your child’s speech at home. S/he needs to feel that talking is easy and that s/he isn’t getting it wrong in any way. We can work on any speech or language difficulties once s/he is speaking happily.

Tell us what you think

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact;

**For York and Selby Area:** 01904 726599

**For Scarborough Whitby, Ryedale Area:** 01723 342472

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