

Selective Mutism in KS 3 and 4

Information for education staff

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

For York and Selby Area: 01904 724366

For Scarborough Whitby, Ryedale Area: 01723 342472

UNIVERSAL LEVEL:

Support, enable and include young people with Selective Mutism through an understanding that;

- Selective Mutism is an anxiety disorder, whereby the young person has phobia like behaviours around talking at certain times, in certain places and with certain people. For instance she may be able to talk with you as you walk along the corridor, but not be able to answer a very simple question in class. Or she may talk with animation to friends, but stop as soon as an adult is nearby.
- She may look 'frozen' and unable to respond or act on what you have said. This may be annoying or distressing to the individual, as they want to respond (even though this may not look the case)
- The individual may find all forms of communication threatening, so she may not be able to write notes when this is expected in place of speech, or use a symbol.
- That fears may have become more than just around speech/communication; she may not like to eat in school/college or go to the toilet.
- The majority of cases are female; this poses obvious difficulties around reporting needs and not liking to go to the toilet. Urinary tract infections are common.

- Some older individuals with Selective Mutism do talk, but only when they are comfortable enough with the person or subject and perhaps when they have instigated it. And/or they may only respond when asked something and then with only a very brief answer (i.e. they never initiate interaction).
- Initiation of communication can be a major sticking point. Does she say she doesn't understand/feels ill/ ask for help/says about an event that's happened/report their illness??
- Some individuals say they feel like they are under a permanent spotlight. They tend to be hyper self-conscious.
- The individual is not being stubborn and is not exercising 'control', although it can feel like this at times. Try to compare it to something you really dislike. Would you be being stubborn if you avoided it?
- School attendance can be an issue. The individual may be feeling very anxious and this leads to constantly high levels of adrenaline, as the 'fight or flight' reaction comes into play. This can lead to stomach pain, headaches, feeling sick and so on.
- Be aware that a young person with Selective Mutism can look non- communicative, expressionless or even sullen. Others smile, but are then are unable to speak.

Also available;

- SLT Training sessions. Contact Gill Clarke, Lead for training, Allied Health Professionals, Children's Therapy Team
Tel 01904 724915
email Gillian.Clarke@york.nhs.uk
- Bespoke training from the SLT regarding the student's specific Selective Mutism issues.
- Attendance at Selective Mutism Core and Advanced level courses. See SMIRA's website.
- Reading the information for 'professionals' on the SMIRA (Selective Mutism information and Research Association) website; www.smira.org.uk



TARGETED LEVEL: 'What you do, in light of what you know'

- Assign an adult that can really get to know the pupil and she can go to when worried about something or needs to report an incident. This will need time to gain a trusting relationship. The pupil may then have enough confidence to write things down or even speak (unlikely) to their mentor. This will need regular timetabled 'catch ups' and a quiet room.
- Certain subjects will be particularly challenging e.g. games and Drama (as she may have focus of attention on her). This will need to be worked out and the pupil reassured, or it could jeopardise attendance.
- It may help if teachers can acknowledge the individual's fears, but in a positive way e.g. "I know it can be tricky for you to talk sometimes...that must be hard for you...it'll get easier...no one is going to force you to speak" This must be done discretely of course.
- Or, can the mentor feedback to staff with information from the pupil? Maybe she could write a little bit of information about her Selective Mutism/speech fear, to be shared with teachers? This must be with her permission however.

- Be aware that the usual tactics for making a shy individual 'warm up' may not work. It's good if the pupil starts to smile and look relaxed, but this may not lead to speech with you.
- When possible, talk to her, but don't ask questions e.g. "Right, I can see what you've done there, but I'm not sure about this part... I like what you've written here, that's great" She may respond.
- If you do need to ask anything, say "I know talking can be a bit tricky, but I know you will if you're able".... "You could point or nod/shake your head, if that's easier for now?" Acknowledging a worry usually helps it diminish.
- Reduce eye contact, especially at the point of expecting a response, verbal or e.g. a point. Sitting side by side if possible.
- Card systems for e.g. signalling illness or a need for clarification will need to be carefully worked out. The individual's hyper self-consciousness usually means they don't work (unless extremely subtle). Likewise writing on boards.
- Some individuals are happy to have the information shared with peers too, to explain how it is for them
- If other pupils say, e.g. "Sally doesn't talk", answer saying, "Yes she does, she talks a lot, just not here at the moment"

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;

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Teaching, Training and Research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of staff and improve health and healthcare in our community. Staff or students in training may attend consultations for this purpose. You can opt-out if you do not want trainees to attend. Staff may also ask you to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Patients, relatives and carers sometimes need to turn to someone for help, advice or support. Our PALS team is here for you.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or via email at pals@york.nhs.uk

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Selective Mutism- KS 3-4

About Us

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Caring with Pride:

Our ultimate objective is to be trusted to deliver safe, effective and sustainable healthcare within our communities.

Our values:

- Caring about we do
- Respecting and valuing each other
- Listening in order to improve
- Always doing what we can to be helpful

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