Advice:

Speech Anxiety

Key Stage 1 & Early Years

Information for parents and practitioners

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

For York and Selby Area: 01904 726599
For Scarborough Whitby, Ryedale Area: 01723 342472
UNIVERSAL LEVEL:
Support, enable and include children with SPEECH ANXIETY through;

- Understanding that the child’s speaking confidence is linked very specifically to variables of who is there, where they are and what the communication task is. So s/he may talk happily to Mum on the approach to school and then stop at the school gate, or may talk to peers on the playground, but not once in school.

- An acceptance that the child is not being stubborn and is not exercising ‘control’.

- That the child will have a varied speaking profile, talking happily and even noisily in some places, with some people, then is silent in others.

- Attendance at local training courses regarding Selective Mutism.

- This would need to be diagnosed by a SLT, but contact our Training Lead Gill Clarke on 01904 724915 or Gillian.Clarke @york.nhs.uk

- Reading the information for ‘professionals’ on the SMIRA (Selective Mutism information and Research Association) website; www.smira.org.uk

- SMiRA

  - A wealth of information regarding Selective Mutism

- The Communication Trust

  - Phonics Guide, for information regarding how children with Selective Mutism may access the Phonics test.
TARGETED LEVEL:
Boost a child’s confidence in speaking by;

- **Not trying** to get the child to speak!

- **Acknowledge the child’s concerns about talking,** but in a positive, ‘it’ll get easier’ way e.g. “I know it’s still a bit tricky to talk at the moment….it’ll get easier”

- **Acknowledge, but negate other children’s comments** e.g. “Sally doesn’t talk”. You then say, “Sally’s a great talker; she’s just not used to doing it here yet”

- Also, say e.g. “Yes, we knew Sally could talk”, **if other children comment.**

- Talk with the child, but **reduce your use of questions** as much as possible. Just create a commentary regarding what you both are doing or what is happening.

- **Reducing your use of ‘tag’ questions** e.g. “…didn’t we?”, “……isn’t it?” and so on. They are still questions and it’s best to avoid them.

- **Reduce eye to eye gaze**, especially at the point when speech may occur, e.g. if you say “That’s a lovely drawing…” ; keep looking at that and don’t look for a response.

- **Sit side by side,** where possible, as this reduces the direct pressure created (to respond) by eye contact.

- When necessary for communication, **encourage non-verbal communication**, through pointing and gesturing, so the child still joins in.

- **Talking in unison** e.g. all the children counting , saying rhymes, singing, or saying ‘go’ together, may help the child find their voice.
• **No comments or congratulations**, if the child does speak.

• **Making sure parents understand too**- how to respond to their child’s varied talking pattern (see advice sheet for parents)

• Being aware that the usual steps to enhancing communication in the early years are counter- productive e.g. **Don’t give forced alternatives/choices, don’t get down and face the child, don’t ‘be silly’ and get things wrong.** These all put pressure on the child to give a verbal response.

**Enhance your practice further, with small group or individual play sessions**

- This is specific time, in a relaxed situation, for the adult to practice the strategies detailed above.

- Fun games are best e.g. noisy toys, Hungry Hippos etc. Anything that is a bit ‘hectic’.

- Spend 10-15 minutes, 2-3 times a week, with the child, perhaps with other pupils if possible.

- Find out about the child’s favourite things and interests. S/he is most likely to feel confident talking about these; their ‘specialist subject’. Can s/he bring toys from home?

- Sometimes noise makers e.g. tissue paper and comb, kazoos, whistles or echo microphones can give the child confidence in making sounds or speaking. Hand them to all the children, don’t look at the child in question, and see if she/he starts to use the toy. Don’t push it if s/he seems anxious.

- Blow football or similar, can also be good for making sounds with the mouth. If not, it’s a nice ‘hectic’ game.

- Or sticky darts. Anything that the child likes and is an ‘active’ toy.

- Parachutes or any physical games equipment may be useful
- Likewise craft or modelling; how long can you go not asking anything?!

- The adult can test themselves on ‘not asking questions’.

- Imagine you’re thinking aloud.

- Narrate what you are doing

- If the child does speak or vocalise in any way, don’t comment and don’t follow on with a question.

- Focus on the activity, especially at the start, not the child.

- Get things wrong, physically, e.g. drop something. It’s good if the child sees adults not being ‘perfect’. But don’t say silly things, or make obvious verbal mistakes to ‘get the child talking’.
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

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.

About Us

Providing care together in York, Scarborough, Bridlington, Whitby, Malton, Selby and Easingwold.

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