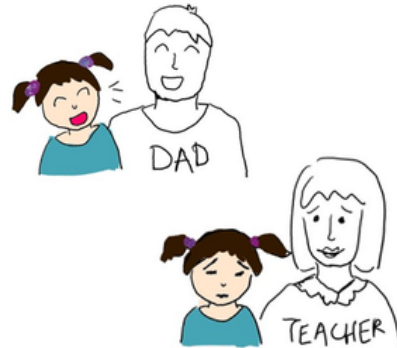


Selective Mutism

Children with Selective Mutism (SM) can speak appropriately and freely at home with their immediate family members. **Their main difficulty is speaking to people outside of their immediate family.**



This is not due to a significant language problem, **it is due to their anxiety.** Sometimes, they may be able to speak to their family members outside of the home but only if no one else can hear them.

Their problem **usually starts in school** because they do not speak to their teachers or classmates.



It is relatively normal for children to be shy or not speak during the first month of school as they adjust to their new surroundings.

However, this period of adjustment **should generally not last longer than a month.**

Children with selective mutism may face **other difficulties** as their mutism continues.

Their **social communication skills may be affected** because they do not have as many opportunities to have conversations and interact with their peers.



Their **learning may also be affected** because they do not participate in classroom activities.

Children with SM may not get better on their own, especially if people around them accommodate by speaking for them or allowing them to escape from not talking.

However, many can get better with intervention.



Intervention for SM usually involves working with the child and parents.

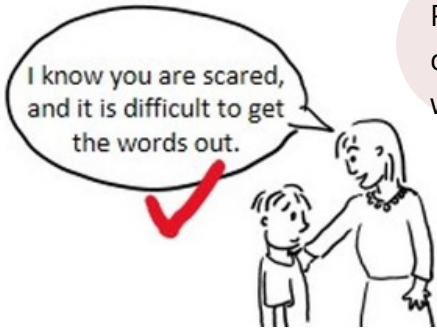


The goal of intervention is usually to **increase the child's comfort with speaking to people outside of their immediate family in a gradual manner.**

Tips to help children with Selective Mutism

1. Reduce expectations to speak

Pressure to speak makes it harder for children with SM to do so, especially when they are already anxious.



2. Warm up time

Speech is unlikely to happen at the beginning of an interaction.

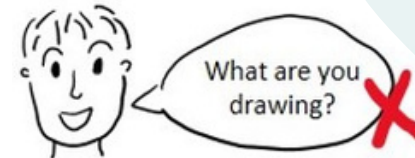
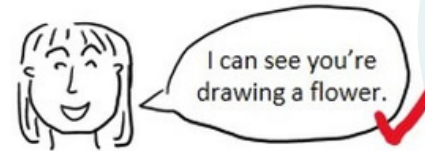
Give your child more time to become more comfortable before prompting for speech.



3. Describe behaviours

Be a commentator and **say what your child is doing, instead of asking questions.**

This helps your child feel less pressured to speak.



4. Use labelled praise

Be specific and say what your child is doing well when they attempt to participate or speak.

This **helps them feel motivated** to keep doing it.



+
WAIT
5
SECONDS

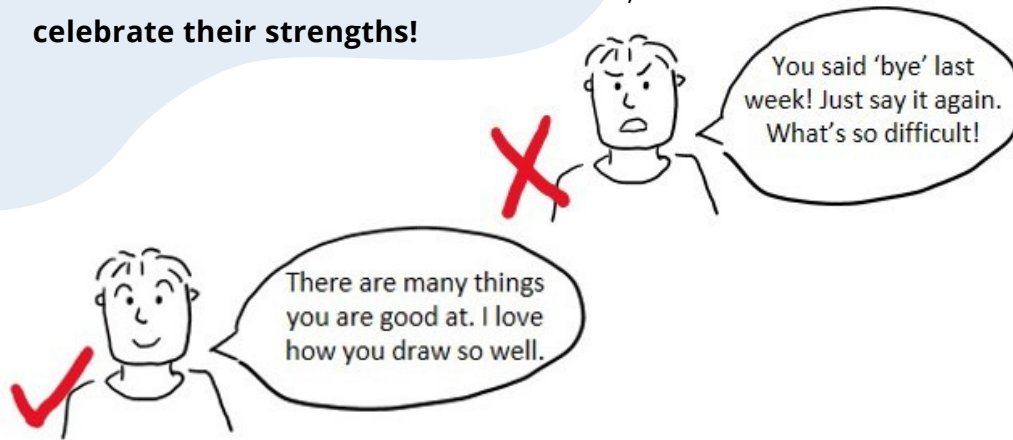
5. Wait 5 seconds (after asking a question)

It gives your child time to think about their answer. It also makes them **learn to tolerate their anxiety.**

6. Do not criticise your child

Selective mutism is not a choice. It is an inability to speak due to anxiety.

Criticising children for not talking can affect their self-esteem negatively, and put them at risk for mental health issues in the future. Instead, **celebrate their strengths!**



7. Work with schools



Discuss with your child's teacher on how parents and teachers can work together to support your child in school.

Consider whether professional support from a psychologist would be helpful.



To learn more about **Anxiety**, scan this QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/KKHDCD-understandinganxiety>



To learn more about **Selective Mutism**, scan this QR code or visit <https://tinyurl.com/KKHDCD-SM>

Disclaimer: The content is for informational purposes and should not be used as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please seek help from a qualified healthcare provider if you have any concerns regarding your child's behaviour.

Department of Child Development

100 Bukit Timah Road
Singapore 229899
Tel: 6-CALL KKH (6-2255 554)
Fax: 6293-7933
Website: www.kkh.com.sg
 www.facebook.com/kkh.sg