

An Introduction to Selective Mutism



Speech and Language Therapy

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Aims

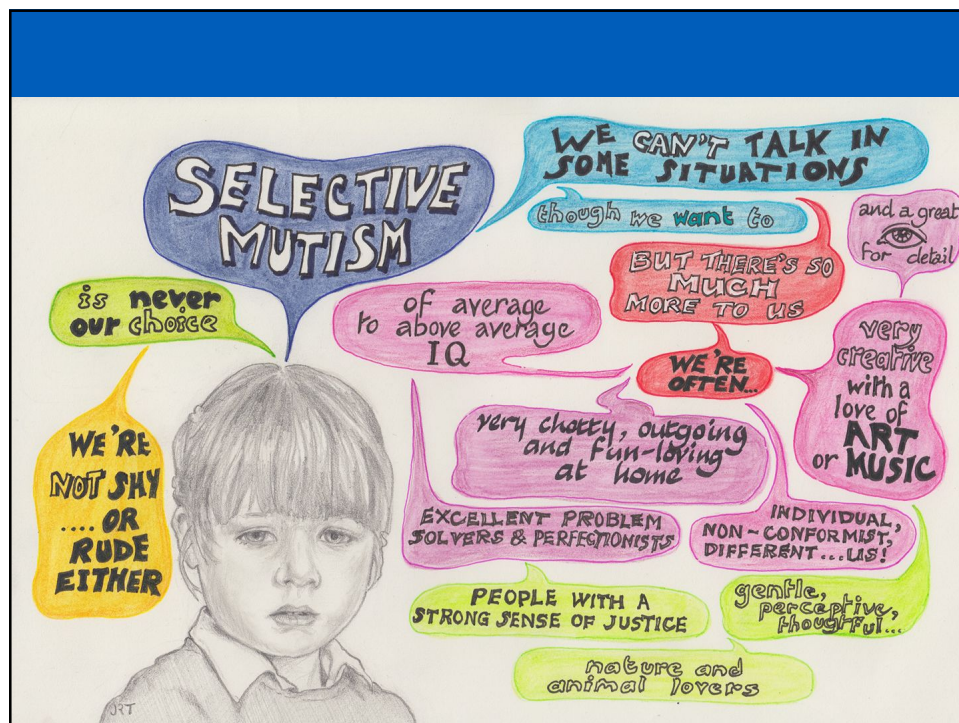
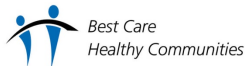
- What is Selective Mutism?
- How common is Selective Mutism?
- What can I do to help?
- When and how should I raise concerns?
- Where can I find more information?

What Is Selective Mutism?

'Selective Talker' is the term used for children who present with difficulties speaking in certain situations or to certain people.

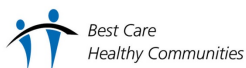
Selective mutism is a diagnosis given to describe an **anxiety-based mental health disorder** where a person is unable to speak in certain social situations or to certain people. They have a phobia of talking.

A person with selective mutism **does not choose not to speak** at certain times, they're literally unable to.



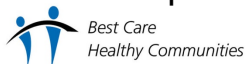
What Is Selective Mutism?

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2VFX_iOnxQ



Prevalence

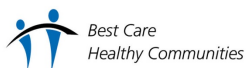
- Relatively rare: 1 in 140 children
- More common in girls than boys
- More common in children who are multilingual
- Usually starts in early childhood
- Early intervention makes good prognosis more likely but can persist



Non-Verbal Behaviours

In addition to not talking, children/young people with Selective Mutism may:

- not look at you or turn away from you
- appear as if they are ignoring you
- not smile or may present with a blank expression
- move stiffly or awkwardly
- find things like laughing, making a noise, blowing their nose difficult.



Cause

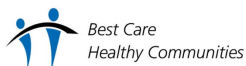
No single known cause.

It may be influenced by:

Personality
Type

Life
Events

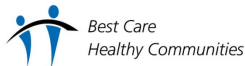
Maintaining
Factors



Diagnosis

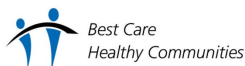
Criteria for diagnosis:

- Persistent failure to speak in specific social situations
- Interfering with other areas of development
- Difficulties have lasted for at least a month beyond their first month at school
- Not better explained by another identified disorder or condition
- Not because of a lack of knowledge of a language



Support

- Direct assessment may be needed - SaLT and EP
- Early intervention is important - 'wait and see' or 'watch and wait' is not advised
- Parents/carers should be involved
- You can support through informal environmental adaptations and/or following specific programmes
- If difficulties are very complex they may need further CAMHS or CBT support (FTB)



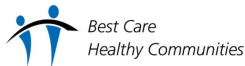
Support

Informal Approach

- ✓ Training and awareness
- ✓ Environmental strategies
- ✓ Supportive, individual consultations with child
- ✓ Positive and open communication with home



Small Steps Programmes



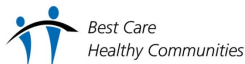
Best Care
Healthy Communities

Support

Training and Awareness

Teachers play a key role in increasing confidence and self-esteem.

- Make sure **all** school staff having contact with the child/young person understands how to best interact with and support them.
- Identify a member of staff who the child/young person can build a relationship with. This person can reassure the child that nobody in school is going to put pressure on them to talk.
- Raise awareness of Selective Mutism amongst peers.



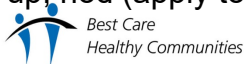
Best Care
Healthy Communities

Support

Environmental Strategies

REMOVE PRESSURE TO TALK

- Never bribe the child/young person to talk.
- Comment, don't question, or use "I wonder..."
- Set up systems to allow the child/young person to access things without having to talk (e.g. toilet)
- Set up pastoral activities to allow the child/young person to develop friendships, which don't put pressure on talking
- If they whisper or gesture to communicate, talk back naturally as if they have spoken. Don't overreact or make a fuss.
- Allow non- verbal ways of responding e.g. eye contact, thumbs up, nod (apply to the whole class)

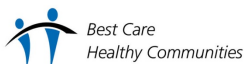


Support

Supportive Consultations

E.g. "Talking can feel scary and your words can sometimes get stuck. It's okay if you can't talk to me right now. You'll be able to when you're ready but until then you can just talk to your mom if you like".

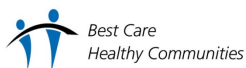
- Give reassurance privately that you won't put pressure on them to talk.
- Take the lead in situations that may require initiating with others e.g. finding a partner or getting help.
- If the child/young person feels comfortable talking within a small group of their peers, don't stand too close and don't try to listen in



Support

Positive Communication with Home

- Involve and liaise with parents/carers. They know the child/young person best. Use their resources and knowledge!

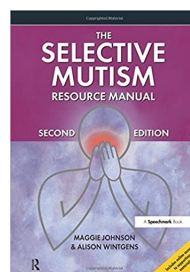
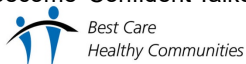


Support

Small Steps Programmes



Supporting Quiet Children: Exciting Ideas and Activities to Help 'Reluctant Talkers' Become 'Confident Talkers', Maggie Johnson

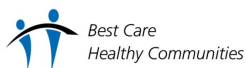


The Selective Mutism Resource Manual: 2nd Edition, Maggie Johnson

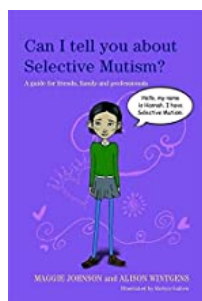
SaLT Role: When to Refer

Refer if the child's selective talking is having an impact on them and/or if they are not making progress after strategies are in place.

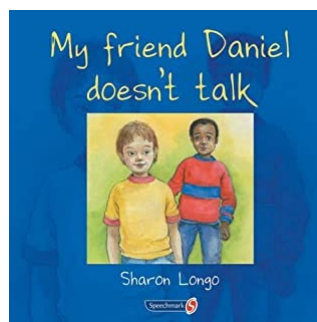
- Advice Line: 0121 466 6231
- Website: www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/childrens-SLT
- Drop in sessions with locality SaLT



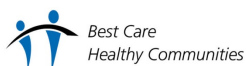
Further Information



Can I Tell You About
Selective Mutism?
Maggie Johnson and
Alison Wintgens



My Friend Daniel
Doesn't Talk
Sharon Longo



Further Information

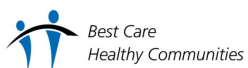
<http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/selective-mutism>

www.bhamcommunity.nhs.uk/childrens-SLT



Questions



Feedback

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/Sencofeedbacktraining>

