

Developing Communication Confidence

Reluctant Talking - Selective Mutism

The Key Person or practitioner involved with this programme needs to understand that:

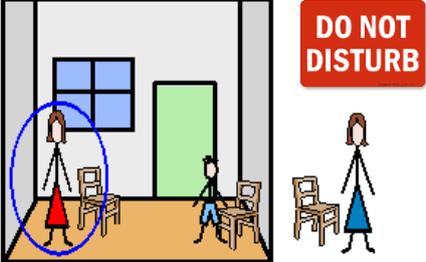
- Some children are highly sensitive and can be fearful of any direct adult: child interaction.
- Just like children with EAL sometimes young children need gentle support to help them to feel confident to use their spoken language.
- When adults have more control over the language (as in school), e.g. they ask the questions and children usually answer, some children can feel anxious when they perceive that there is a demand on them to speak.
- Anxiety or separation can trigger the fight/flight or freeze response and some children experience a tightness in the throat that immobilises the vocal chords making talking actually **impossible**. Children can sometimes use a whisper or quiet altered voice in some situations. When the anxiety is lower children can speak more freely such as during play with familiar peers.
- Children may be sensitive to proximity and touch – give them space and avoid contact games.
- With a highly sensitive nervous system some children find giving and receiving eye contact difficult, keep your own eye contact relaxed and light. Do not insist on eye contact or consider it a communication target. It is often an involuntary response when socially engaged (regulated) so is very difficult to control consciously.

When the assessment of the child is complete and the child’s stage of confident talking has been agreed in discussion with parents/carers and key staff then the programme can be planned with detailed reference to ***The Selective Mutism Resource Manual (2nd Ed) by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens (SMRM2)***.

<p style="text-align: center;">Stages 1-4</p> <p>1.Frozen 2. Participates without communication 3. Uses non-verbal and written communication</p>	<p>Focus on safety in relationship between KP and parent/carers Safety in environment and in presence of KP Building rapport and trust - Shaping p199 SMRM2</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;">Stages 5-7</p> <p>5.Uses voice 6.Uses single words 7.With sentences</p>	<p>Developing confidence with spoken language in setting</p> <p>Shaping can be continued and the communication load can be increased. Lone/Remote Talking – child talks alone and adult gradually overhears p198 SMRM2</p>	<p>Sliding In – using a conversational partner e. g Parent p196 SMRM2</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Stage 8</p> <p>8.Conversation</p>	<p>Generalising speech to other adults and peers (one person at a time) p200 SMRM2</p>	

In every aspect of the programme **plan the steps with the child and other participants** - Parent/ other staff. Use a drawing/plan **in collaboration with the child** to begin the first session.

At the end of each session (Step) outline what will happen with a drawing and notes what the next step will look like for the child. Example:

<p>Step 1 [Visual description]</p> 	<p>Agreed by:</p> <p>[child....]</p> <p>[KP:.....]</p> <p>[Parent....]</p>
<p>[Description notes]</p> <p>J and Mum are in the quiet room engaged in a motivating activity that involves speech. Mrs A is outside the room.</p>	<p>How did it go ?</p> <p>e.g : 😊 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 👍</p>

Plan to have the same room and a backup space to use if necessary. Try not to cancel the session. Plan 3- 4 sessions per week (e.g. Mon, Wed, Fri – sessions close together keeps the momentum). Agree a time limit for each session (10-15 mins). It is important to explain each step to the child, and make it clear that you will only continue for as long as they feel comfortable. Stop the session if child looks visibly anxious.

Plan activities for each stage – **SMRM2 Appendix A p343+**.

Ensure that the **Do Not Disturb** sign is on the door and the room is not overlooked by others.

Write each target down on the programme plan as you go along, and as each is achieved, invite the child to tick it off, or record their anxiety level, depending on their age. If target proves too difficult either:

- i) acknowledge that the step was too difficult and immediately make it easier, or
- ii) stop early, showing the child how well they have done and explaining that you will try again next time. Do not fill the remainder of the session with an enjoyable non-verbal activity.

Start each session with a warm-up by repeating an activity from the previous session and giving positive feedback. Then go forward, if necessary breaking a previous target into smaller steps to ensure success. Do NOT keep repeating safe activities – unless they are with different people or in a different place. On average you move through the steps over a period of a few weeks.

What if it's not working? Ask yourself 'What's changed?'

Invite views from child and parent/carers.

Refer to **p257 SMRM2** for troubleshooting guidance before holding a review meeting.