

WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH *Selective Mutism*

WHAT IS SELECTIVE MUTISM?

According to the Selective Mutism Association, Selective Mutism is “a childhood anxiety disorder characterized by a child or adolescent’s inability to speak in one or more social settings (e.g., at school, in public places, with adults) despite being able to speak comfortably in other settings (e.g., at home, with family).” While children with Selective Mutism understand language use and have the physical and cognitive ability to speak, they are unable to speak in particular settings due to anxiety.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTIVE MUTISM

- Fear of social embarrassment
- Social isolation and withdrawal
- Negativism
- Temper tantrums
- Disguising of voice or speech
- Difficulty responding nonverbally
- Slow to respond
- Blank facial expression
- Reduced eye contact
- Frozen “deer in headlights” look

TREATMENT OF SELECTIVE MUTISM

STIMULUS FADING

Child may be with someone they talk to easily at first. Then, a new person may slowly join in. This will help the student become more comfortable in new situations.

SHAPING

Child may be praised or rewarded for trying to communicate, gesturally and verbally, and regardless of volume.

SELF-MODELING TECHNIQUE

Child may watch videos of his/herself talking in a comfortable situation, such as home. This may help him/her feel more comfortable in other situations.

THE DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH CHILDREN WITH SELECTIVE MUTISM

- Remove all direct pressure to speak
- Ask forced-choice questions (e.g., Do you want this or that?)
- Avoid asking yes/no questions
- Provide student with extended response time (~5-10 seconds)
- Do not try to guess what the child wants
- Repeat what the child says in a statement form
- Provide specific praise for talking
- Do not worry about volume
- Do not overreact when child speaks or does not speak
- Be patient