

Selective Mutism

Besides seeking professional help, other helpful strategies to consider:

- Acknowledge your child's anxiety when it presents. Do not downplay your child's anxiety by saying something like, "Come on, don't be shy."
- Do not force your child to speak up. Gently and persistently encourage them to speak up.
- Find out from your child what are his/her fears are with regards to speaking in unfamiliar situations.
- Address your child's fears using a problem-solving approach, if possible. Go through together with your child ways that he/she can overcome his/her anxiety or anxious thoughts by using a problem-solving approach. Brainstorm with your child possible ways that he/she can overcome his/her anxiety; evaluate their pros and cons and get the student to decide what is the best solution for his/her situation.
- Get your child to implement his/her chosen solution and evaluate its usefulness together with your child. Regardless of the effectiveness of the solution, praise your child for actively overcoming his/her anxiety on his/her own and not avoiding the anxiety. Emphasize to your child that there will usually not be a perfect solution but the important thing is that he/she gradually tries to overcome the anxiety.
- Practice with your child specific relaxation or cognitive strategies that can help him manage his/her anxiety better in situations which require him/her to speak up. (For specific relaxation and cognitive strategies to manage anxiety, please refer to 'F' and 'U' in the section on 'Tips to help your child cope with his/her anxiety')
- Support your child to gradually overcome his anxiety by exposing him to a speaking situation he/she feels least anxious about first. Encourage your child to use the relaxation or cognitive strategies you have taught to manage his/her anxiety in that situation. When the child feels more confident about himself/herself in that social situation, encourage your child to face up to a speaking situation that causes him/her the next higher level of anxiety by using the strategies that have been taught to him/her. Repeat this step until the child is able to manage her anxiety in the speaking situation that is causing him/her the most distress. For example, your child may be anxious about speaking up in his/her phonics class. Get your child to speak to you (perhaps play a guessing game) in the waiting area with no one around. When he/she is comfortable with that, encourage your child to speak to you when there are some children around and progress to speaking with your child in the presence of the teachers and classmates. Gradually, include the teachers and classmates in the conversation.



- You may wish to institute a reward system to encourage your child to speak up in different situations.
- Be patient with your child's improvements as selective mutism often takes a long time to overcome.