

Selective Mutism

Besides seeking professional help, other helpful strategies to consider:

- Acknowledge your student's anxiety when it presents. Do not downplay your student's anxiety by saying something like, "Come on, don't be shy."
- Do not force your student to speak up. Gently and persistently encourage him/her to speak up.
- When rapport has been established with your student, find out from your student what are the fears in regards to speaking in unfamiliar situations. If your student refuses to speak yet, encourage him/her to write or draw to communicate their fear of speaking in school. You may find out more by speaking to the parents since the student usually communicate readily at home with familiar people.
- Address your student's fears using a problem-solving approach, if possible. Go through together with your student ways that he/she can overcome the anxieties or anxious thoughts by using a problem-solving approach. First, brainstorm on the possible ways to overcome the anxiety and then evaluate the pros and cons; then, encourage the student to choose what is the best solution for his/her situation.
- Get your student to implement his/her chosen solution and evaluate its usefulness together with your student. Regardless of the effectiveness of the solution, praise your student for actively overcoming his/her anxiety on his/her own and not avoiding the anxiety. Emphasize to your student 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 student specific relaxation or cognitive strategies that can help him/her better manage the anxiety 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 student cope with his/her anxiety')
- Support your student to gradually overcome the anxiety by exposing him/her to a speaking situation he/she feels least anxious about first. Encourage your student to use the relaxation or cognitive strategies you have taught to manage his/her anxiety in that situation. When the student feels more confident about himself/herself in that social situation, encourage your student 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 student is able to manage his/her anxiety in the speaking situation that is causing him/her the most distress. For example, your student may be anxious about speaking up in his/her class. Get your student to speak to a classmate that



he/she feels most comfortable when the other classmates are not around. When he/she is comfortable with that, encourage your student to speak to a few classmates in the counseling room or empty classroom, then to a group of classmates and finally to the entire class.

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