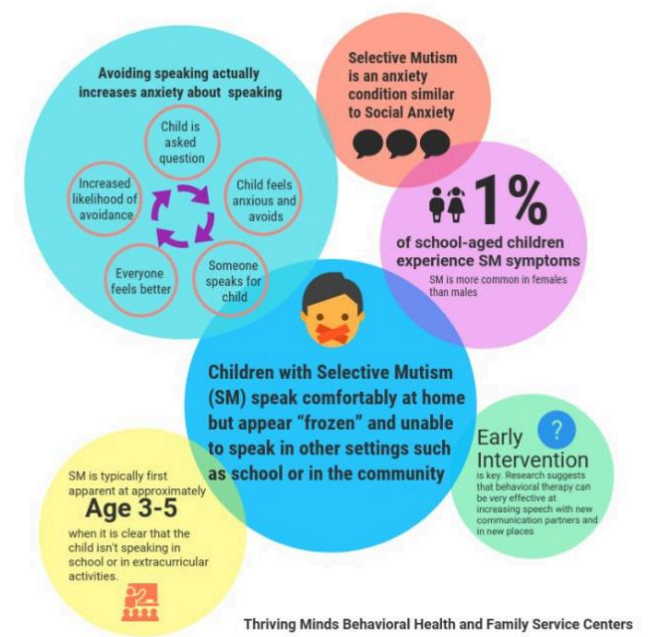


Selective/Situational Mutism



Here at CFHD we offer guidance, advice and therapy with the aim of helping your child become more confident with their communication.

Talk to your named therapist for more information about their reluctance to talk – this can sometimes be referred to as Selective Mutism/Situational Mutism

What is Selective Mutism/Situational Mutism (SM)?

Selective Mutism (increasingly referred to as 'Situational Mutism'), is an anxiety related difficulty which usually starts in early childhood. Children and young people presenting with SM are able to speak confidently in some situations (e.g., at home with people they are close to or familiar with), but are silent in others. In addition to difficulties with speech in certain situations, children and young people may also present with a blank expression, or appear 'frozen' when expected to speak. This is also linked to the anxiety response.



Supporting your children

It is essential that a key adult is identified to support the work our service provides. This might be a teaching assistant, school counsellor, learning mentor, student support worker, or someone else.

These adults are well placed to **develop a positive and trusting relationship with the child or young person**, implement strategies consistently within their everyday environment, and liaise with you about progress or concerns.

As a service, **we work 'through' these key adults**, supporting them via a coaching and consultation approach

Children and young people with SM want to speak, but find themselves physically unable to do so due to their anxiety

With early identification and appropriate support children and young people can make progress and develop the confidence needed to use their voice.

However, in some cases SM may persist into later adolescence and sometimes into adulthood. It is therefore important for us to understand that children and young people with SM should not be left to 'grow out of it'.



What can I expect from an appointment with Speech and Language Therapy?



Before seeing a Speech and Language Therapist, families and professionals working with your child or young person will be asked to access freely available, online training (via the Kent Speech and Language Therapy service)

<https://www.kentcht.nhs.uk/childrens-therapies-the-pod/speech-and-language-therapy/selective-mutism/>

This training:

- Outlines practical strategies
- Supports you in developing your understanding of what causes children/young people to withdraw from communication or become silent in certain situations
- Enables families and professionals to put support in place straight away



An appointment will be offered for a **telephone** or **virtual consultation**, depending on your preference. During this appointment you will be asked about:

- Your child/young person's developmental history
- The support already in place

Your therapist will:

- Consider a formal diagnosis of Selective Mutism, any need for further assessment, and will liaise with any other professionals involved in supporting you and your child.
- Discuss next steps

The support we offer is to empower and enable those working with the young person. This will involve liaising with the key people working with them to establish a programme which will be implemented within the environment they are most affected.

This means, unless it is absolutely necessary, it is unlikely we will arrange to see your child/young person directly (as this can cause them additional anxiety).



Top tips to support an anxiety free environment



- ✓ Remember, the root of SM is in anxiety. It is not an oppositional behaviour or a choice
- ✓ Respond to all forms of communication (eye contact, smiling, sharing objects, nodding/shaking their head, texting, writing etc)
- ✓ Be patient and let the child speak when they are ready e.g. by providing the opportunity to speak without pressure to do so (make comments rather than ask questions)
- ✓ Encourage physical activities and participation
- ✓ Promote their independence and resilience (showing it is OK to make mistakes)
- ✓ Encourage and praise participation (focus on building relationships through activities that do not require speaking e.g. puzzles, football, or any games you notice they enjoy)
- ✓ Foster friendship with peers (by offering a prompt or structured support if they look lost or unsure e.g. 'X can you help Y build a tower?')



Things to avoid

- X Pressurising the child to speak in any way (this includes well meaning encouragement to say hello, or to 'use their words' etc)
- X Withholding rewards if/when they don't speak
- X Giving the child too much attention for either speaking or not speaking
- X Using negative labels within earshot of your child e.g. saying she won't talk to you.
- X Pressuring them to mix with other children as much as their peers might do.

