

# Top Tips to support children and young people with Selective Mutism

Community & Therapy Services  
Speech and Language Therapy Department  
Northern Lincolnshire and Goole

This leaflet has been designed to give you important information about your condition / procedure, and to answer some common queries that you may have.



# Information for parents and carers

## Background

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder that stops children from speaking in social situations such as in school, in public in certain activities. They are able to speak fluently in other situations, such as with close friends, family or when no-one else is listening. It affects about 1:140 school aged children.

It is important to remember that the child wants to talk but anxiety stops them from doing so. It is important that those closest to the child know how to support them.

Some children who are reluctant speakers will have similar difficulties but these usually improve over a 3-6 month period of support. Their difficulties are also not usually as wide ranging.

## General Advice

### Do...

- Remember it is anxiety stopping them from talking
- Reassure them that they will be able to speak when they are ready
- Try to remove all pressure on them having to talk and don't put them on the spot to talk
- Praise any effort to join in and interact with others, even if this is non-verbal (e.g. passing a toy to a friend, smiling)
- Encourage them to build a relationship with a key member of staff
- Allow children to talk through others they are comfortable with. If they are happy speaking to a certain adult or child, allow

them time during the day to spend time with this person

- Use activities in class where children can join in within a group in a variety of ways e.g. non verbally, singing or talking as a group rather than being singled out
- Encourage other children to include the child in play
- Encourage the child to choose between verbal and non-verbal responses

### Don't...

- Ask lots of questions; try commenting on what they are doing instead
- Correct their speech or put them on the spot to talk
- Ask them to wait for their turn to speak, instead ask "who would like to tell me something"
- Withhold rewards for not speaking
- Give too much attention for either speaking or not speaking as this can make them self-conscious

## Getting help

- If your child is not speaking in school/pre-school for at least eight weeks, you will need to discuss with staff and put in place a range of strategies such as those described in this leaflet.
- We would recommend school and pre-school settings purchase and implement strategies provided in "Supporting Quiet Children" (Maggie Johnson and Michael Jones).



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# Information for parents and carers

- You can find additional advice and information on selective mutism on the following websites:  
[www.smira.org.uk](http://www.smira.org.uk)  
[www.ican.org.uk](http://www.ican.org.uk)  
[www.afasic.org.uk](http://www.afasic.org.uk)
- If your child continues to have difficulties after 4-6 months you may want to refer to your Speech Therapy Department (children aged 3-5 years) or the Access pathway (children aged 5 years+).
- The Speech Therapy Department is able to offer assessment to exclude any other underlying speech and language difficulties and a one-off package of care to provide additional strategies and advice where appropriate.
- Please note the Speech and Language Team are not able to provide a diagnosis of Selective Mutism but are able to exclude any underlying speech and language difficulties.
- You and setting/ school may also want to consider a referral to Mental Health and Wellbeing Service (formerly CAMHS).

## References

The selective Mutism Resources Manual (2005) Johnson, M. & Wintgens

Selective Mutism Organisation  
[www.selectivemutism.org](http://www.selectivemutism.org)

Selective Mutism Information and Research Association (SMIRA) [www.smira.org.uk](http://www.smira.org.uk)

## Community Clinics

Immingham Children's Centre, Eastfield School, Margaret Street, Immingham.

A clinic is also held at the Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital, Grimsby. This is held in the Speech and Language Therapy Department. Tel: 03033 303758

For Scunthorpe and surrounding area: Monarch House Tel: 01724 203755

## Parking

If your appointment is to attend the Diana, Princess of Wales Hospital, you will need to pay for parking.

There are a range of buses which stop outside of the hospital

<https://bustimes.org/stops/22800002960>

## Northern Lincolnshire and Goole NHS Foundation Trust

**Diana Princess of Wales Hospital**  
Scarcho Road  
Grimsby  
03033 303758

**Scunthorpe General Hospital**  
Cliff Gardens  
Scunthorpe  
03033 306889

**Goole & District Hospital**  
Woodland Avenue  
Goole  
01405 720720  
[www.nlg.nhs.uk](http://www.nlg.nhs.uk)

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