



Supporting Children with Selective Mutism and Speech Confidence Difficulties

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Learning Outcomes

- ▶ To develop knowledge of Selective Mutism and speech confidence difficulties
 - ▶ To be able to differentiate between Selective Mutism, reluctant speakers and shyness
 - ▶ To have knowledge of suitable intervention options
 - ▶ To have knowledge of strategies and resources that can be used in school to support children with speech anxiety.
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Creating a plan for our school

Small steps:

- ▶ Who do we need on board?
 - ▶ What stage is the child at/what needs do they have?
 - ▶ Which maintaining factors can we remove?
 - ▶ What are the child's interests/favourite activities?
 - ▶ What resources do I need?
 - ▶ What's worked so far?
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What are your fears?



Selective Mutism: Diagnostic Criteria

- ▶ Related to Social Anxiety Disorder Consistent **failure to speak** in social situations in which they are expected to, despite ability to speak in other situations
- ▶ Failure to speak interferes with **academic and occupational achievements** or social communication
- ▶ Duration of disturbance: **at least 1 month** (not limited to first month of school)
- ▶ Does not occur exclusively during the course of ASD
- ▶ More likely to manifest in young children than adolescents/adults

Selective Mutism: Behavioural Symptoms

- ▶ Does not initiate speech/reciprocally respond to others in social interactions
- ▶ Children **will usually speak** in their home in **presence of immediate family**
 - But may **not** in front of close friends/second-degree relatives (grandparents, cousins etc.)
- ▶ Unable to speak at school
 - Academic impairment, social impairment
- ▶ Children might sometimes use nonverbal means to communicate
 - grunting, pointing and writing

Shyness Vs. Selective Mutism

Avoidance

Withdraw from communication both V and NV

Will use NV skills to communicate with others

Persistence

When confidence increased V and NV communication will improve

NV confidence to communicate may increase but speech will not

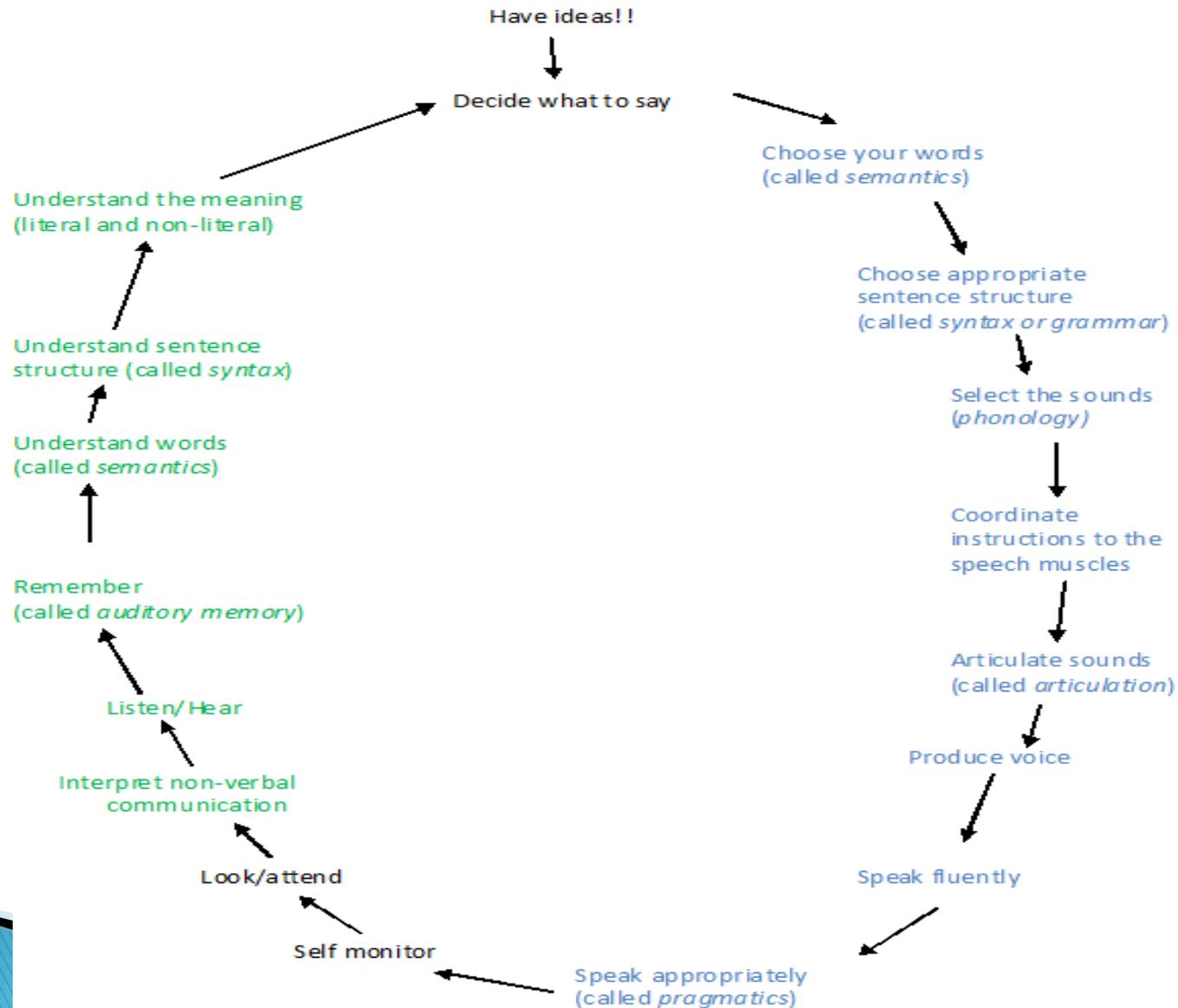
Intensity

Can be comforted by hugs and cuddles

Can become 'frozen' and not easily reassured

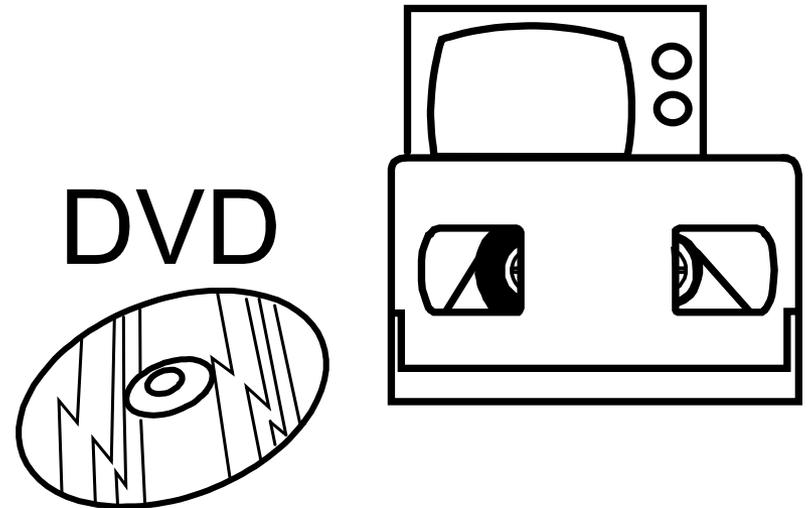
Shy children will 'warm up' to talking whereas SM children won't

The Communication Chain



Children with Selective Mutism can
and want to speak but don't

SMIRA VIDEO – Silent Children Approaches to Selective Mutism



True or false...

»» Myth busting SM

True or False?

- ▶ Children avoid speaking due to the emotional distress it causes them
- ▶ TRUE
 - physical signs may be apparent e.g. blank expression / look embarrassed / fidgety / socially unresponsive/ hesitation

True or False?

- ▶ Children learn to stay quiet to achieve emotional wellbeing
- ▶ TRUE
 - “avoid anxiety by not attempting to speak” as a self protection strategy

True or False

- ▶ Children with SM are controlling
- ▶ FALSE
 - Children with SM are not ‘controlling’ they are just trying to control their anxiety e.g. I’ll only go if you come with me is a coping strategy that the child uses to control their anxiety not to control the adult / person.
 - Children are internally attempting to cope with the consequences of talking vs the consequences of not talking.

Predisposing factors

- *Personality traits* – sensitive, perfectionist, anxious
- *Family history* – shyness, SM, anxiety , bilingual background, language and/or developmental difficulties

Precipitating factors

An event occurrence that triggers the underlying anxiety

- *Separation, loss or trauma*
- *Frequent moves*
- *School / nursery admission*

Causes of SM

Maintaining factors

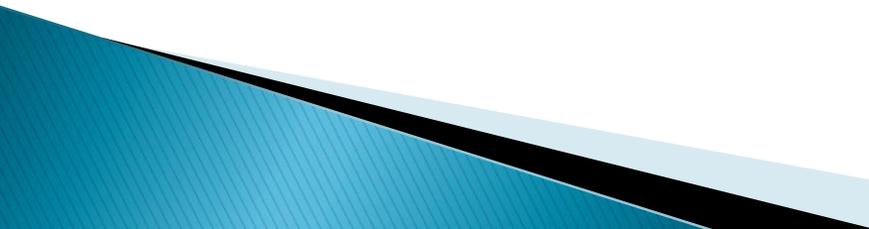
Inappropriate response to silence e.g. hugs and cuddles

- *Ability to successfully convey messages using NVC therefore reduced frustration experienced*
- *Pressure to speak – exacerbates anxiety*
- *Others will speak for the person*

Implications for the School Setting

- ▶ Transitions and Unexpected events
 - ▶ Playtimes/lunchtimes
 - ▶ Assessment
 - ▶ News
 - ▶ Letting others know
 - ▶ Asking and answering questions
 - ▶ Risk taking
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Management Approaches

- ▶ Aim to reduce pressure to talk – this reduces anxiety for it and increases opportunity for spontaneous communication.
 - ▶ Focus intervention programmes in areas where mutism occurs e.g. Sliding in; opportunities for safe risk taking
 - ▶ Child as an active partner
 - ▶ Behavioural approach adopted following systematic approach to environmental modifications – SMALL STEPS.
 - ▶ Self regulation and graded risk taking
 - ▶ Ongoing social skills and confidence building
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Acknowledging the difficulty

Involves an honest discussion re: plans to help child talk to others (with permission from parents).

Explain to the child that:

1. You know how it feels
2. They are not alone
3. There's a reason why they feel this way
4. You want to help get rid of that feeling
5. You're going to use tiny steps only to do this
6. You will move on only when the child is ready
7. If they ever feel uncomfortable they can stop
8. It won't always feel like this

Handouts 2 & 3 from the Selective Mutism Resource Manual provide examples of the correct phrasing to use or books e.g. My Friend Daniel doesn't Talk, Understanding Katie

Aim to eliminate maintaining factors

- Reassure the child by acknowledging speech anxiety
- Avoid sharing personal anxiety around SM with child e.g. *frequently questioning the child or sharing concerns with staff in front of the child*
- Do things with and not for the child e.g. If they are able - *get objects / equipment independently from area rather than have them given or passed to them*
- Offer opportunity to talk without placing demands on child to speak e.g. *I wonder if* (choices). Create curiosity – “I wonder if...”
- Humour – make mistakes and show that it’s ok
- Providing opportunities for 1:1 or small group rapport building
- Accept non verbal means of commenting and making requests e.g. For answering the register, going to the toilet, choosing snack.
- Do not insist on eye contact when talking to the child
- Play down comments from others about the child’s difficulties. Explain that the child can speak but it is difficult at times.

The Sliding In Approach

5 Phases of Intervention

- ▶ Building Rapport
- ▶ Making the Child an Active Partner – discussion and goal setting
- ▶ Eliciting Speech
- ▶ Generalising Speech
- ▶ Letting Go

The Stages of Confident Speaking and accompanying aims can be grouped according to these phases for systematic progression.



Stages of Confident Speaking

1. The child does not communicate or participate at all.
2. Child co-operates but with limited communication e.g. may show enjoyment or make limited choices.
3. Child communicates non verbally e.g. via pointing, drawing.
4. Child uses non-verbal sounds e.g. laughing, animal noises.
5. Child will speak within earshot of key worker but not directly to them e.g. speaks to Mum in front of teacher.
6. Child uses single words with key worker e.g. may respond to questions with minimal information.
7. Child uses connected speech with selected people e.g. able to speak to certain adults when no-one else is listening.
8. Child speaks to several people in “safe” settings e.g. can speak to adults in school when others listening but wont speak directly to unfamiliar adults.
9. Child speaks to selected adults in range of settings but still struggles to speak to certain individuals and/or strangers.
10. Child communicates freely to all – volunteers information and contributes to class discussion freely.

(Johnson and Wintgins (2001))

Eliciting Speech for the First Time

▶ Building Rapport

Aims:

- To gain the trust of the child for enjoyment of sessions.
 - To determine the conditions that reduce the child's anxiety enough to promote speech with the keyworker.
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- Involves working through stages of confident speaking 1 – 4.
 - Timing – 1–2 sessions in uninterrupted setting.
 - In school 5–10 minute sessions with tangible reward for younger children. Older children may need a different approach if rapport already built.
 - Settings – Home, pre-school, clinic, school.

▶ Preparing to Elicit Speech

Aim: To enable the child to speak to the keyworker who will in turn introduce the child to new people and settings as appropriate.

- ▶ Involves working through stages of confident speaking 5 – 7.
- ▶ Utilise specific treatment approaches and desensitisation techniques to reduce the child's anxiety.
- ▶ Must consider:
 - Communication load of activities
 - The pace, detail and size of steps
 - Involving the child with the plan so they have a clear end point.

Generalising Speech across People and Settings

- ▶ Moving through stages of confident speaking 8–10.
 - ▶ All people in the child's environment must be aware of the child's needs – children and adults.
 - ▶ Child as an active partner in the planning process.
 - ▶ May not generalise to larger groups automatically – need structured plan.
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Fading in a Range of People (Stage 8 and beyond)

Technique required varies with anxiety level:

- High – sliding-in procedure 2
- Medium – move from low to high communication load activities.
- Low – gradually increase the numbers of people.

Shortcut techniques:

1. The Talking Circle – new people invited to join a talking circle during a low communication load activity. Progress towards high communication load activities and fade out the keyworker.
2. Walkabout – conversation routine established with keyworker in safe setting. This is continued while walking to another location.

Eliciting Speech Without a Conversational Partner

Lone Talking

- Desensitises client to sound of their own voice – video/audio recording.
- o Telephone programme
- Involves regular 15 minute sessions as planned with key worker.

Shaping

- Systematically work through stages 4 –6 without a familiar talking partner followed by stimulus fading techniques.
- Takes longer although speech can be achieved after 20–60 sessions.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

- o Thinking causes feelings causes behaviour – ACT
- o Thinking traps – Paul Stallard, Superflex Michelle Garcia Winner
- o Stinkin thinkin vs Supa thinkin thinking diaries – Helen Davidson
- o Collaborative goal setting e.g. bridging the gap
- o Self/Co – regulation strategies, 5 Point Scale, Zones of Regulation, Kimochis

Other hints and tips

Pitch strategies at the level the child is at in that setting – to encourage social communication

- ▶ Using visuals *as a whole class approach* e.g. communication books/month book, core boards, talking pictures books, word walls
- ▶ Non verbal communication – change the question to enable this
- ▶ Verbal intermediary – with steps
- ▶ Handover/takeover
- ▶ Discussion with others – handouts 3 and 4

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Any questions?????????



Useful Resources

The Selective Mutism Resource Manual (Johnson and Wintgins) Speechmark Publishing

http://smira.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Planning_and_Managing_A_Small_Steps_programme_20101.pdf

My Friend Daniel Doesn't Talk (Longon)

Understanding Katie (Dr Elisa Shipon Blum)

Helping your child with Selective Mutism : Practical Steps to Overcome a Fear of Speaking(McHolm, Cunningham and Vanier)

SMIRA www.selectivemutism.co.uk

www.selectivemutismwa.com

The Activ Library WA

