



# Selective Mutism: A Parent's Guide



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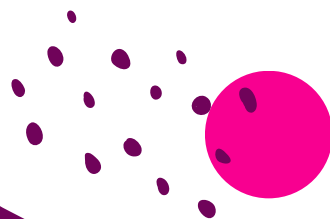
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# What is Selective Mutism?

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Selective Mutism is an anxiety disorder that affects children's ability to speak and communicate in certain social situations, despite being capable of speaking in other environments. Children with Selective Mutism often have a profound fear of speaking in specific contexts, which can hinder their social and academic development.





# Different Types of Selective Mutism:

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There are different types of Selective Mutism, including:

## Primary Selective Mutism:

In this type, the child has never been able to speak comfortably in certain situations, such as at school or in public.

## Secondary Selective Mutism:

Children with secondary Selective Mutism have previously been able to speak in certain situations but have since become selectively mute due to anxiety or traumatic experiences.



# Checklist for Parents: Characteristics of Selective Mutism

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To help you identify potential signs of Selective Mutism in your child, consider the following checklist:

- ✓ Consistently avoids speaking in certain situations/with certain people
- ✓ Difficulty initiating and participating in conversations
- ✓ Becomes visibly anxious when asked to speak
- ✓ Difficulty making eye contact and engaging in social interactions
- ✓ Appears comfortable speaking at home but not in public
- ✓ Shows physical signs of anxiety (e.g., sweating, blushing, trembling) in specific situations

# How is Selective Mutism Diagnosed?

Selective Mutism is typically diagnosed by a Paediatrician, Mental Health Professional or Speech Pathologist. Diagnosis may involve a thorough assessment of your child's behaviour, communication skills, and evaluation of their history of selective mutism.



# Steps You Can Take If You Suspect Your Child has Selective Mutism:

If you suspect that your child may have Selective Mutism, here are some initial steps you can take:

## 1. Consult a Professional:

Reach out to a Paediatrician, Mental Health Professional or Speech Pathologist for an evaluation.

## 2. Create a Supportive Environment:

Encourage open communication at home and provide a safe space for your child to express their feelings.

## 3. Educate Yourself:

Learn more about Selective Mutism to better understand your child's challenges.



# Next Steps to Support a Child with Selective Mutism:

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If your child is diagnosed with Selective Mutism, consider the following steps:

## **Seek Therapy:**

Consult a therapist or counsellor experienced in treating Selective Mutism.

## **Collaborate with School:**

Work closely with your child's school to develop an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).



# Strategies for Supporting Children with Selective Mutism:

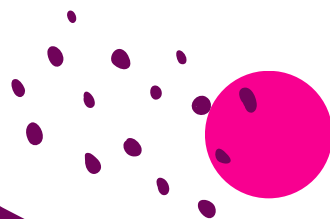
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Praise and reward your child for speaking or attempting to speak in challenging situations.
- **Gradual Exposure:** Start with less anxiety-inducing situations and gradually work up to more challenging ones.
- **Speech and Language Therapy:** Enrol your child in speech therapy to improve communication skills.
- **Play Therapy:** Use play-based approaches to reduce anxiety and encourage communication.
- **Visual Aids:** Use visual cues or communication boards to facilitate expression.
- **Model Speaking:** Demonstrate appropriate communication in social situations.
- **Breathing Exercises:** Teach relaxation techniques to manage anxiety.
- **Desensitisation:** Gradually introduce your child to new people and settings.
- **Sensory Tools:** Provide sensory items to help regulate anxiety.

- **Peer Interaction:** Encourage interactions with understanding peers.
- **Home-School Collaboration:** Maintain open communication with teachers and therapists.
- **Social Stories:** Use social stories to prepare your child for new experiences.
- **Self-Expression:** Encourage alternative forms of expression, like art or writing.
- **Acceptance and Patience:** Be understanding of your child's progress and setbacks.
- **Avoid Pressure:** Avoid pressuring your child to speak.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Establish achievable communication goals.
- **Language Games:** Engage in fun language games to reduce anxiety.
- **Peer Modelling:** Arrange playdates with peers who can serve as positive role models.
- **Relaxation Techniques:** Teach relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing.
- **Professional Guidance:** Seek guidance and support from mental health professionals.



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Remember that every child is unique, and progress may vary. Be patient, supportive, and willing to adapt strategies to meet your child's specific needs. Seek professional assistance for a comprehensive treatment plan tailored to your child's circumstances. Please reach out to Inspire Allied Health and Education Group to find out how we can support your child and family.





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