

FOR SOME CHILDREN, TALKING AT KINDERGARTEN IS IMPOSSIBLE ...



If you **work with children**, we would like to stress the importance of learning about **selective mutism**. This condition is believed to be caused by anxiety, and usually first presents in **early childhood**.

As many teachers and health professionals have never heard of selective mutism, it is very often missed or mistaken for shyness. Unfortunately, children with selective mutism very rarely grow out of it, so **early recognition is crucial**.

Children with selective mutism **can talk in some situations** (usually at home with their family) but **cannot talk in others** (such as at school, pre-school or kindergarten). If you know of a child who presents any of the following symptoms, it is possible they may be suffering from selective mutism:

- Speaks freely and fluently in their **comfort zone**.
- Literally **cannot** speak in other, select situations.
- May speak to **some people** but not others.
- May **avoid eye contact** and wear a blank expression.



If you recognise any symptoms of selective mutism in a child it is important that you **don't assume that they may just be shy**. Working together with the child's parents and making adjustments to reduce potential anxiety at a young age could **avoid years of difficulty** and the potential complications of selective mutism. Here are some steps you can take to **ease the pressure for the child ...**

Speak to the child's parents

- Ask what the child is like at home.
- Let them know if the child is not speaking, and to whom (teachers, peers or both).

Work with the parents

- Encourage them to stay a little longer to help interaction between the child, peers and teachers.
- Let them know about any steps you have in place to help the child, so that these can be adopted at home and out and about.
- Communicate often and share any improvements / issues.

Consider seeking additional support

- It may be necessary to contact a special education body to help the child.
- Sometimes parents and teachers work together very closely, and the child can progress without professional involvement.

Communicate openly to reduce pressure and expectation for the child to speak.

- Use words like "I **wonder** what colour (name) might choose to draw with next?"
- Sit next to the child instead of opposite them.
- Play games where there is no expectation to talk to build a rapport.
- Treat all communication efforts as though they are spoken, and act normally if the child does say something.

Read about selective mutism

- Research selective mutism, to gain a greater understanding.
- Share picture books that are written for this purpose.
- There are a few books we recommend. Please visit

www.selectivemutism.org.nz/books

and enter code **VOICE25** to receive a **25% discount** on the products we sell.



www.selectivemutism.org.nz