



What is Selective Mutism?

If someone uses a hearing aid, you *know* they have trouble hearing you. If someone else uses a wheelchair, you *know* they have difficulty in walking. A person who stammers can have problems in saying what he or she really wants to say. These people have disabilities. Selective Mutism is a type of disability too, but it's one which can be very hard for other people to understand, as it isn't something you can see.

Some of us might be terrified of spiders and be unable to go in a room if we knew one was there. Some people are scared of heights, of flying, of water, of dogs, or even cats. We call these fears phobias. Selective Mutism is a type of phobia, too. People with SM can speak normally and want to speak, but find they can't speak in some situations. They can behave and speak normally when they are somewhere they feel relaxed and comfortable, such as at home. In other places, like school, they feel frightened and worried that someone might ask them to speak, when they find it so difficult.

Someone with Selective Mutism might communicate in other ways, perhaps with a nod of the head, by pointing or by writing. They don't want to be seen as different, be rejected or told off and hate anyone drawing attention to them. They want to be able to join in with others without being expected to speak, until they are ready to do so.



How can you help someone with Selective Mutism?

- Don't try and get them to speak – this will only make things worse for them.
- They find it easier when they are in small groups. To help them join in, invite them to sit with you.
- If they have a best friend, they will feel more relaxed when their friend is in the group, too.
- Talk about what you are doing, or comment on things, but please don't ask them direct questions, such as 'What's the name of your dog?'
- Don't laugh at them or try to copy them. They find that very hurtful.
- If you are picking teams in school, please don't leave them until last – they want to be included and hate standing out from the crowd.



- If they begin to feel more comfortable and suddenly feel able to start speaking, please don't laugh, shout out or make a big fuss about it. Just act normally and take no special notice. They were always able to speak – just not everywhere.

SMiRA
Challenging Selective Mutism

www.selectivemutism.org.uk