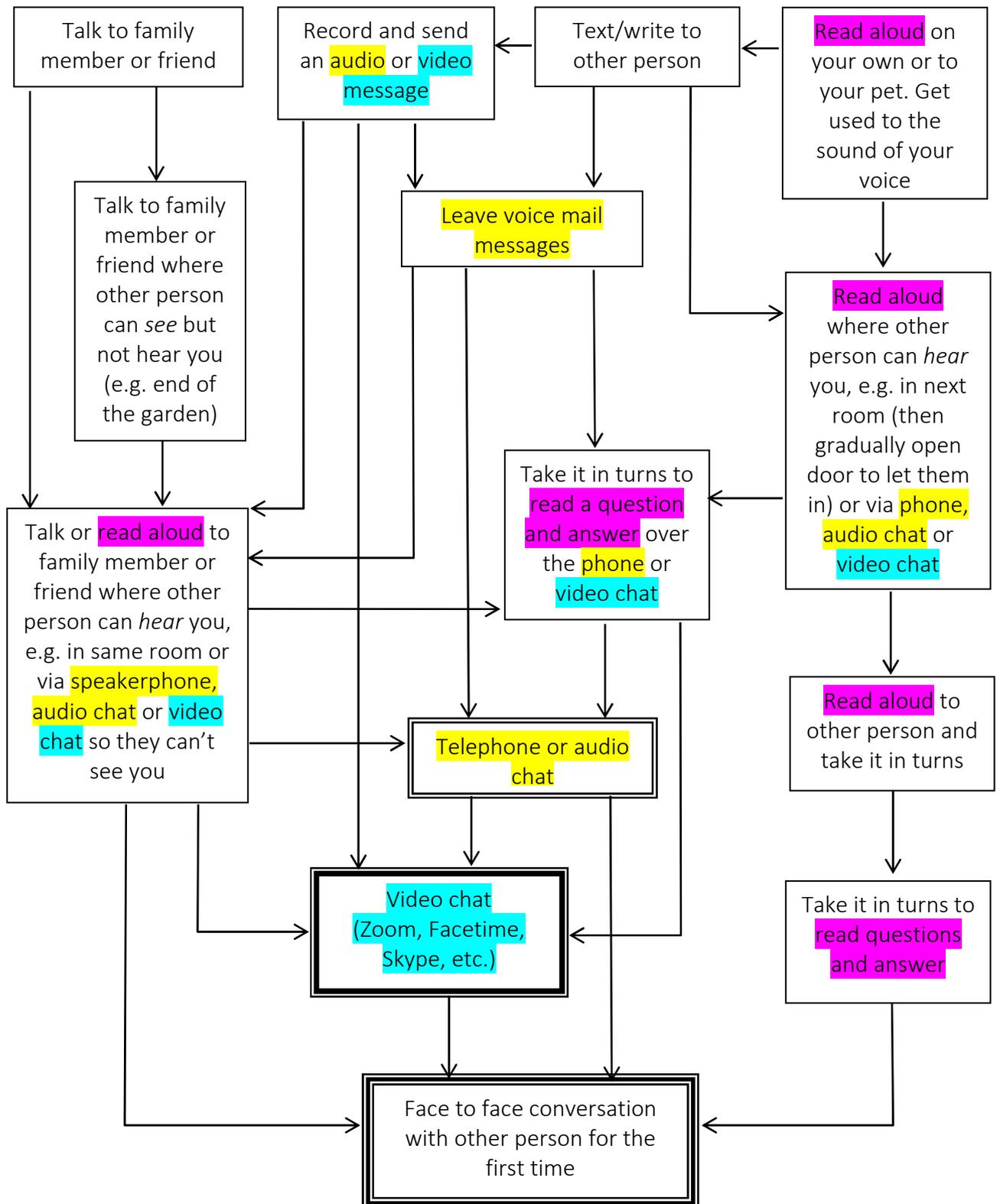


Getting the better of selective mutism – a small-steps approach

Possible routes to talking face to face – start with what you can already do



For more detail see pages 2-4 for video chats (Zoom, Facetime, etc.) and page 5 for the reading route.

1. **Video Chat Route** (Zoom / Facetime / Skype etc.) **with support of parents**

Do not worry how long this takes – it might take one session or several sessions, but your perseverance will always pay off! Don't leave too long between sessions for best results – no more than 2 or 3 days. Ideally, carry on the next day.

1. Parent arranges a guessing game to play with friend or relative (N) via video chat, e.g. Hangman, Battleships, Guess Who? or adapted Headbanz or Pictogram. Start with games that need single words and build up to sentences. See next page for Battleships grid.
2. It's OK if child doesn't want to be in camera range at first, they can just watch, no need to join in straightaway. They'll gradually get closer to parent as they realise there's no pressure to talk and the game looks good fun. Often children come closer if parent pretends to get stuck, e.g. 'Oh dear, what's that, it looks really weird!'; 'Hmm, I wonder if I should go for H6 or H7?'
3. N and parent chat to each other as usual. N doesn't ask the child any direct questions but talks to them commentary-style, e.g. 'You won't believe what Nana did the other day...'; 'You're good at this, aren't you?'
4. Parent involves the child by asking questions where they can respond by pointing, nodding or shaking their head, e.g. 'Do you think it's a dinosaur?', 'Shall I choose this square or that one?', but puts no pressure on them to talk to N. Parent responds to the child's gestures as if they are talking, e.g. 'Great idea, you just sank one of Sam's submarines!' When that's easy...
5. Parent asks the child choice questions ('X or Y?') where the child answers with one word, e.g. 'What do you think Grandad's drawn this time, do you think it's a **dragon** or a **camel**?' Parent waits 5 seconds (keep smiling, don't look anxious!) and moves on if the child doesn't respond, 'I'll try... **camel**'. Children often find it easier to correct you than reply, so get it wrong!
6. Once the child is chatting *easily* to parent, it's OK for N to ask them direct questions, but still the focus is on N playing and chatting with *parent*, rather than trying to get the child talking. At this point we are just aiming for the child to be comfortable talking to parent in view of N.
7. If N asks the child a direct question, parent must always wait 5 seconds to give them a chance to answer. If no response, parent repeats the question to the child or makes it easier (turns it into a yes/no question or an 'X or Y' question). There is no pressure to answer N, the child can answer the parent (the parent acts as a 'talking bridge' between N and the child).
e.g. Grandad: Give me a clue, Liam. What family does it belong to?
Mum (after 5 seconds): What family does it belong to, Liam. Is it a plant or an animal?
8. As soon as the child wants to play the game, let them take a turn. This is the best way for them to talk directly to N but parent should stay for another couple of games to make sure the child doesn't need them as a talking bridge.
9. Once the child is playing the game well with N, their parent leaves so they can play it unsupported. If the child seems anxious, leave just for a short while, e.g. to get a drink, and promise to be back very soon. This is where games are so valuable as they give the child a familiar structure for talking which is much less scary than an open-ended conversation.
10. Build up to games like 'Don't Say It!' which feel just like conversation and promote free talking.

Battleships

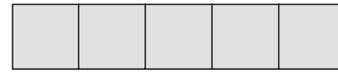
The object of the game is to sink your opponent's fleet before they sink yours. Each player has a 10 × 10 grid on which they fill in the squares to depict various vessels (see next page). A second 10 × 10 grid is used to record the hits and misses when attacking the other player. Players take it in turns to target one of their opponent's squares, hoping that they will score a direct hit. When successful, they are told what type of vessel has been struck, and this helps guide their next 'missile'.

Players send a missile by naming a square ('D4', 'E9', etc.). Their opponent replies 'miss', 'submarine', 'tanker', etc. The original player then writes 'S', 'T', etc. in the square or marks it with a dot if it's a miss. Their opponent can cross out the square on their own grid to make sure no cheating is going on!

Handout A1 BATTLESHIPS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A										
B										
C										
D										
E										
F										
G										
H										
I										
J										

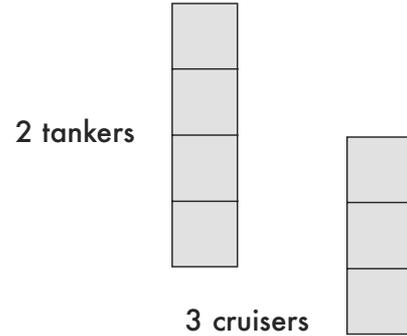
Add to grid:



1 battleship



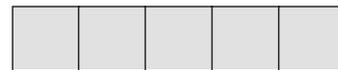
5 submarines



BATTLESHIPS!

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A										
B										
C										
D										
E										
F										
G										
H										
I										
J										

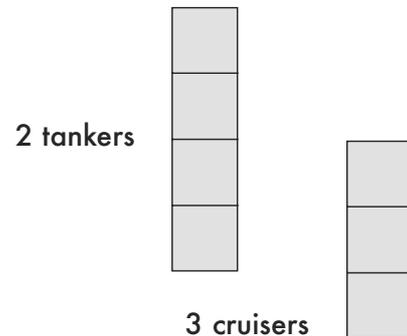
Find and sink:



1 battleship



5 submarines



4. Reading Route – working towards conversation with a keyworker/relative

This is an excellent starting point for children and young people who are competent readers and are able to read aloud when on their own with a keyworker. As such it represents the quickest route to establishing speech, but should never be adopted if it causes distress or 'shut-down'. An advantage of this method is that it does not require a parent or other talking partner's presence - not all children find this helpful and not all parents are available. Reading aloud is usually less daunting than other verbal activities as the child does not have to worry about saying the wrong thing or being expected to enter the unpredictable and personal world of conversation. Success is dependent on the child knowing that their difficulties are understood, and trusting that by reading aloud they will not suddenly be expected to speak any more than they feel comfortable. It also helps to sit beside rather than opposite the child, following the text so the child does not feel scrutinised as they read.

Young children may approach this route via reading groups, where children read the same text in unison and join in as best they can, following the text with their finger and saying whichever words they can manage. Older children and teenagers may be able to read aloud following a period of rapport-building and explanation of their difficulties: introduce it by saying that you understand that certain things like being asked unexpected questions can be very difficult, but that reading aloud is usually easier because they won't need to find their own words to express themselves.

Activities can be moved towards true communication in a few sessions as follows, starting with a familiar paragraph or piece of work that the child has looked at in advance:

- a) child reads a short passage.

If voice is steady and audible rather than whispered or strained, it is possible to go straight to d). Otherwise use b) and c) for smaller steps to improve voice through repetition and gradual relaxation.

- b) keyworker and child take it in turns to read alternate sentences from a short passage or familiar poem.

- c) (emphasis moving from reading to more interactive turn-taking):

Keyworker and child read different characters' lines from a set number of pages or for a set number of minutes (local amateur dramatic companies will have comedy and pantomime scripts you can borrow and TV scripts are available to download. See also 'I Say!' in STASS catalogue.

or Child reads out numbers, the days of the week and months of the year and then says them alternately with the keyworker, aiming for steady pace, rhythm and voice (may be quiet but should not be strained).

- d) reading games and activities involving turn-taking, questions and answers. e.g. the keyworker asks questions that can be answered by reading out from the text; the child reads out crossword clues for the keyworker to solve; teenagers and keyworker take it in turns to read out quiz questions from magazine.

- e) activities involving turn-taking, questions and answers without reading.