

**SMIRA statement regarding the use of the terms 'reluctant speaker' and 'reluctant talker'.**

SMIRA has noticed an increase in the terms 'reluctant speaker' and 'reluctant talker' being used as synonyms for Selective Mutism. We find the use of these terms is unhelpful, as they may be misleading, promoting the mistaken belief that people with SM may be refusing to speak, rather than being unable to do so.

Many of our families feel that 'Selective Mutism' as a name for the condition is not ideal, as there is still confusion over the word 'Selective'. In SM, 'Selective' is being used as a medical term to mean affecting some things and not others. It does not refer to selecting, as in making a choice. This is an important distinction.

The name 'Selective Mutism' has international recognition and diagnostic criteria within the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM 5) and the International Classification of Diseases (ICD 11). SMIRA believes that until such time as the name is changed officially it should be the term used. There is increasing evidence from research to suggest that SM varies widely in complexity, in how it presents and in the factors that contribute to its occurrence. It has become clear that SM cannot be simply divided into types or described as a spectrum and therefore all cases that fit the diagnostic criteria should be entitled 'Selective Mutism' or 'SM'. However, at present, we will continue to use the descriptors 'Low Profile Selective Mutism' and 'High Profile Selective Mutism' as defined in the Selective Mutism Resource Manual 2nd Ed., Handout 3, Johnson & Wintgens (2016). SM is currently still an often overlooked and misunderstood condition, so we feel that the use of these terms helps to ensure that it is clear that young people do not have to be completely silent in their challenging spaces to "qualify" as having SM.

Over the past thirty years SMIRA has striven to raise awareness of SM as an anxiety disorder in which the person is unable to speak (either at all or freely) rather than refusing to speak, and to dispel myths and challenge misinformation around the nature of SM whenever possible, and we will continue to do so vigorously into the future."

---

**Selective Mutism Information & Research Association**

**Hon. President:** Biddy Baxter MBE DLitt.,  
**Hon. Vice-President:** Benita Rae Smith MRCSLT, MA  
**Patrons:** Tony Cline BA, DipPsych., Ph.D, Jonathan Straight

---