

Statement from SMiRA regarding the use of the term ‘Situational Mutism’

Recently, SMiRA has had a number of enquiries about whether the term “situational mutism” is now preferred over “Selective Mutism”. We are aware of some grassroots change and some trainers advising the use of ‘situational’ as the preferred term.

We are releasing this statement to clarify our position, as the UK’s national charity for selective mutism.

Currently, "Selective Mutism" is the official medical term which MUST therefore be used in all diagnostic reporting and signposting . "Situational mutism" is not a recognised diagnosis and may make it harder for affected families to find support groups, access disability benefits and so on.

"Selective" is a medical term which means "some of the time; in some situations" as opposed to "pervasive" which means "all of the time; in all situations". This is a different use of the root word “select” and does not imply "selecting" meaning making a choice.

It takes many years for labels like these to be changed by the World Health Organisation and other diagnostic manuals and is not done lightly. Whilst selective mutism remains the official term, it should be used. An explanation can be given to those who don't understand, that SM is "situational" but they should then also be advised on the true meaning of "selective" as used in this context.

The use of different, unofficial names and labels for Selective Mutism, makes it harder to raise awareness, campaign, and educate people in how they can support people with the condition.

Until such time as there is an official change of name, SMiRA’s strong recommendation is the use of the official term ‘Selective Mutism’. People may wish to add “sometimes known as situational mutism”, especially if this is the family's preference.