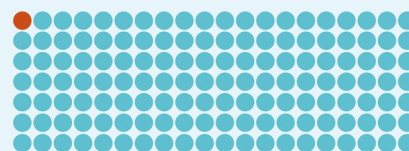


Is your child chatty at home but silent at nursery?



It's normal for children to be quiet for the first few weeks in a new nursery, particularly if the language spoken there is different to their home language. If your little one isn't speaking at nursery and they have been attending for over a month, they may have **selective mutism**.

Selective mutism affects 1 in 140 children.



What are the signs of selective mutism?

Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder (phobia) that means children can talk in certain situations but not in others. They may be able to talk at home or with close family members, but unable to speak at nursery or with relatives they don't see very often. Little ones with selective mutism often have other fears and anxieties, and they may have speech, language, or social communication difficulties too.

If your child has selective mutism, then they are not choosing not to talk, and they aren't just shy – they are physically unable to talk in certain situations. Little ones with selective mutism can be 'frozen' with fear, meaning they aren't able to talk even though they want to. They may have a blank or frozen facial expression, and their movements may become stiff or awkward.

Why does my child have selective mutism?

It isn't always easy to identify why a child has selective mutism, though anxiety does often run in the family. There's no evidence to suggest that little ones with selective mutism are more likely to have experienced trauma, abuse, or neglect than any other child.

- Some children may become distressed when separated from their parents, and transfer this to the adults who try to settle them.
- Speech or language difficulties can make talking anxiety-provoking.
- Noisy, busy environments can be overwhelming, causing some children to 'shut down'.
- Some children with selective mutism also have autism.

How can I help my child overcome their selective mutism?

Your child won't just grow out of selective mutism, but there's a very good chance they will overcome it given the right support.

It's important not to make a big deal out of whether your little one talks or not, and to avoid putting them under any pressure to speak. You can help by role-modelling chatting with people outside of the home while including your child in conversations and activities. Make sure they have plenty of opportunities to join in without talking, and to speak when they are ready. Allow them to talk through you, friends, or siblings – the more they talk in front of others without any fuss being made, the sooner they'll overcome their fear.

Find further information

Selective Mutism Information and Research Association (SMIRA)

Further information from the NHS

Selective Mutism: Tips for Parents (video)

The Do's and Don'ts When Interacting with a Child with Selective Mutism (video)