

Where To Get Help

If your child has not yet seen a doctor and you suspect that he is showing signs of Selective Mutism, you may raise your concerns with your child's school counsellors. School counsellors are connected to our community mental health service, **REACH** (Response, Early intervention, Assessment in Community mental Health), which can provide further advice and assistance.

If your child is seeking help at our clinic, please raise your concerns with your child's doctor, nurse, or allied health professional.



Department of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry

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SELECTIVE MUTISM



WHAT IS SELECTIVE MUTISM?

Selective Mutism is a rare condition characterised by a child's anxiety, fear or phobia of having to speak at school or in other social settings. Selective Mutism is normally noticed in children when they start school, but the condition can be present at all age levels including adolescents. Children with Selective Mutism might avoid eye contact, blush, freeze or stare blankly when addressed by people with whom they are unfamiliar.



What Causes Selective Mutism?

Many factors are thought to contribute to Selective Mutism, including:

- the temperament of the child or adolescent
- developmental difficulties, particularly in the area of language
- anxiety, particularly social anxiety, leading to a persistent fear of performance or interaction in a certain social setting, most often school
- family interactions



MANAGEMENT OF SELECTIVE MUTISM

Treatment of children or adolescents with Selective Mutism involves a combination of methods and ways:

PSYCHOLOGICAL THERAPY. Cognitive behavioural therapy (a form of talking therapy that aims to change the way a person thinks and behaves) is commonly used to help children with Selective Mutism overcome their anxiety of speaking. This is done by:

- removing or reducing any pressure for them to speak in any setting
- helping them identify their own anxiety levels and learn to cope with their anxiety
- progressively introducing situations that could encourage communication and dividing up these situations into steps
- providing opportunities for them to start speaking to a caregiver, sibling or friend with whom they are comfortable, at home or in the school environment
- new people such as classmates and teachers can be introduced subsequently
- setting up a rewards system to motivate change

SUPPORT AT HOME. Encourage your child to develop independent skills. Give the child responsibilities at home (e.g. with household chores). Encourage your child to purchase items that he wants (e.g. buying a favourite burger).

USE OF MEDICATION. Depending on the severity of the condition, medication may be prescribed to help reduce symptoms of Selective Mutism. Talk to the child's doctor if you have any queries or concerns about medication.

You can also help your child by being patient, understanding and supportive. Be encouraging and empathise with his or her challenges. Celebrate all small successes and be positive.