



Let's Talk

Selective Mutism

“ We had a meeting with my son’s teacher the other day. She told us that Marcus will not talk at school, even on the playground. He talks just fine at home, so I don’t know what the problem is. He says he’s afraid to talk, but I don’t know if he’s just being stubborn. I’m taking him to his doctor to see if there is something wrong.” —Chandra

Children With Selective Mutism

Does your child talk at home but not at school? Does he tell you things but won’t speak to anyone else? You may have been told that your child has selective mutism. This means that your child doesn’t talk in certain places, such as school or in groups.

Selective mutism is not the same as being shy around new people. Children who are a little shy may not talk at first. It may take them some time to get comfortable. A child with selective mutism doesn’t talk, even over time.

Some children who are learning another language will not speak in either language for a short time. This is called a “silent period.” It will go away over time and is not the same as selective mutism.

Does Your Child Have a Speech or Language Problem?

Your child probably knows a lot of words and may speak in very clear, long sentences when she does talk. She may have some problems saying sounds correctly or using words, but this is not why she doesn’t talk.

So why won’t your child talk? She may be:

- Very anxious or afraid when in public, also called social phobia
- Very shy
- Afraid that she’ll be embarrassed
- Withdrawn

Fast facts

- Children with selective mutism can talk, but sometimes will not talk in public.
- Selective mutism usually starts before a child is 5 years old.
- Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, can help.

How Can a Speech-Language Pathologist Help?

Speech-language pathologists, or SLPs, work with children who have trouble communicating. Your child may not have a speech or language disorder, but he does have problems communicating. Selective mutism can make it hard to make friends or do well at school. SLPs can help your child feel more comfortable speaking in different situations.

What Will the SLP Do?

The SLP may be the first person you see when you are worried about your child. The SLP will ask you questions and test your child's speech and language. You may have to help with this if your child won't talk to the SLP.

The SLP may work as part of a team to find out why

your child isn't talking. The team may also include your child's doctor, teacher, a psychologist, or others.

Your child's SLP will work on what your child needs. If he has any speech or language problems, the SLP will work on those. A lot of the work will focus on making your child feel comfortable talking to others.

The SLP may:

- Have your child talk to someone he usually talks to, and then bring new people into the room
- Get your child to slowly start trying to talk by whispering or using hand gestures
- Have your child start to communicate using pictures or written words
- Let your child see himself talking on video

The SLP may also work with your child's teachers to help him feel better about talking in class.

“The doctor had us take Marcus to see a psychologist and told us to have his speech and language checked. The psychologist thinks that Marcus is very anxious and afraid of making a mistake. Marcus actually talked to the SLP, which surprised us. The SLP didn't think he had any speech problems but is going to work with him so that he'll try talking at school. I never knew that a child could have trouble like this. I'm glad there is help out there.”

—Chandra

Selective mutism can cause problems in a child's life. Help is available.

To learn more about selective mutism or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP's name is

Appointment

Compliments of
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
and