



Dear faculty and staff,

You are receiving this handout because a child in your class/school has an anxiety disorder called selective mutism. Children with selective mutism are able to speak comfortably in some situations (usually with their families at home), but are persistently silent in other situations (school or other social settings). When asked a question, a child with selective mutism might appear to look frozen, have a blank expression, and/or have awkward/stiff body language. Selective mutism is NOT normal shyness, stubbornness, or deliberate defiance. Children with selective mutism are anxious and can't talk in these situations. With your help, your student can feel safe and comfortable in your school setting.

Quick Tips for Interacting with a Child with Selective Mutism:

- Change your, “hello” to, “nice to see you” or, “I’m so glad you are here today.” The word “hello” can make kids feel pressure to speak.
- Engage the student by commenting or describing things they are doing without asking questions until they are comfortable.

NOTE
Some
students
will not
be ready
for this
yet

- *When your student is comfortable*, ask forced-choice questions (“Do you want the red marker or the blue marker?”) You can also ask an open-ended question (“What color marker do you want?”), but please avoid yes/no questions.
- Wait at least 5 seconds for a response after asking a question.
- Give positive feedback/labeled praise for any response (“Thank you for telling me that you want the red marker.”)
- Never punish the student for not being able to talk.
- Remember that even though the student is not speaking, they are hearing everything that you say.