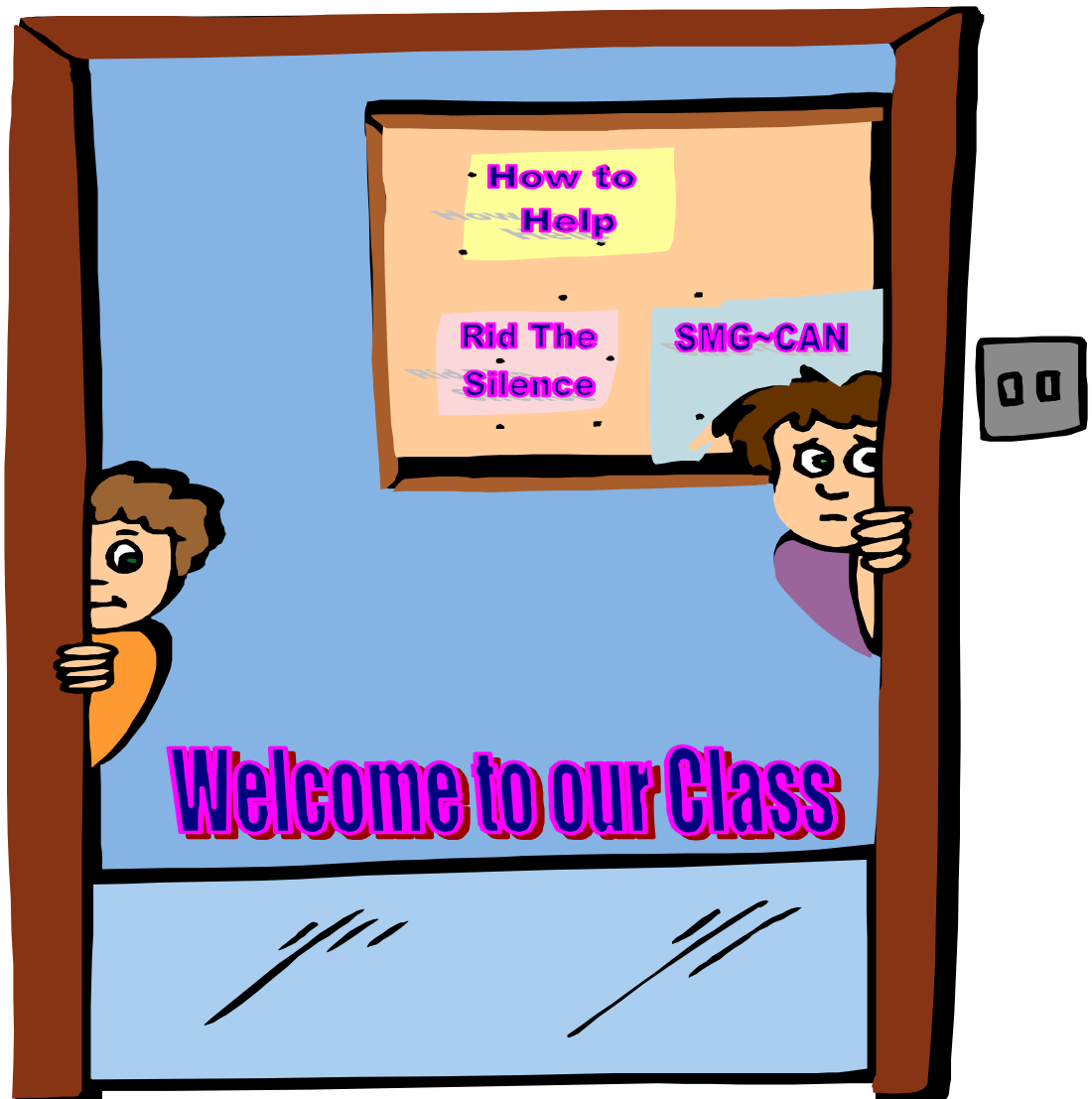


Selective Mutism Group ~ Childhood Anxiety Network



Coordinating the SM Connections Support Function

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The Value of Support Groups

By: Carol Villa

SUPPORT GROUPS CAN:

- Provide a safe, non-judgmental, and confidential outlet for sharing with others who have gone through similar experiences.
- Provide understanding and assurance for others in the group that they are not alone.
- Provide the opportunity for members to help each other through the sharing of knowledge and experiences.
- Provide ideas and avenues wherein members can begin to regain some control over their lives.
- Offer resources, speakers, and information.
- Provide the opportunity for the formation of new support relationships.

Finding out that your child has a mental health disorder can be a difficult thing for many parents. There are so many things to think about. How is this going to affect my child at school, and what kind of support do they need? What if my child needs medication? Who should be treating them, a pediatrician or psychiatrist/psychologist? What kind of resources in the community can be helpful? What can I do to help my child? There are so many questions to be answered!

Professionals agree, that just like we grieve the death of a loved one, a divorce, loss of a job, or finding out that your child has a mental health disorder, emotions of grieving are something that everyone goes through, and needs to go through.

SM Connections

Building a support network for families.

Our support network consists of:

A US Coordinator who provides information to the State Coordinators
State Coordinators

Each state coordinator will distribute information to the local members

Each state member is asked to distribute information with guidance from the State Coordinator to:

- School Teachers
- School psychologist/counselors
- Personal therapists and physicians
- Local library and grocery store bulletin boards.
- At least two mental health organizations within their community

Types of Support Groups

With all of the technology we now have at our fingertips, there are many ways to build a support group.

E-mail: Set up your e-mail address book with the member names under a group heading, for example, SMCT Members. This way you can e-mail all at once. Take care to use the “Blind Copy” function to protect the confidentiality of our members. Individual members e-mail addresses can only be given to other members with the express permission of that member.

Telephone: If you have total phone, you can connect to a certain number of members at the same time.

On-Line Chats: There are chat rooms that can be accessed to include a group of people.

In Person Groups: See instructions in this guide.

Setting Up a Support Group

Step One: Contact the SMG-CAN members in your state to get their input.

1. Would they like to be part of a support group?
2. What kind of group?
3. How often would they like to meet or chat?
4. Where?

Note: Non-members can attend one support meeting. You should have a supply of handouts available, including membership information.

Step Two: Determine the type of support network your state's members would like (e-mail, telephone, on-line chat, in person)

1. Set time and date of group.
2. If necessary, get instructions to the members for how to access the meeting.

Step Three: If it is to be a face-to-face meeting, pick a location.

1. Many town libraries and town halls allow non-profit groups to hold meetings in their facilities. They may also be able to provide some equipment (overhead projectors, etc.), if needed.
2. There may be members who are willing to host the group in their home until an appropriate facility can be located.
3. Contact local schools or churches and ask if they would allow you to meet in their library, cafeteria, community room, etc.

Step Four: Get the word out.

1. Make up flyers announcing the meeting. For your convenience, a sample template is included in this document. Place flyers in schools, libraries, and grocery stores, any place you can think of that allows public postings!
2. Many newspapers will allow you to place support group listings in their paper free of charge. This will enable non-members to attend, if they are interested. Contact as many publications as you can and ask how you can get your group listed. Include the SMG~CAN website address (selectivemutism.org) in the announcement.

3. E-mail members with information about the time, place, and location (including directions) of the meeting. (There is a template in this package for your convenience.)
4. Contact parent advocacy groups and mental health groups that you have been in touch with. Let them know about the support group. E-mail or mail the flyer to them, if they are willing to post it.

Running a Support Group

- Have a sign in sheet (One is included in this document.)
- Introduce yourself: Handout your SM Connections business card (if you printed any), give a little history on why you became involved with SMG-CAN and what your role as state coordinator will be.
- Have others introduce themselves.
- At first get together; just get to know each other.
- Discuss what is important to them, what would they like from the group.
- Introduce the goals of SM Connections.
- Review or give out copies of our Confidentiality Policy (included in the State Coordinator instructions packet). Discuss the Confidentiality Policy and reassure them that the information discussed within the group will stay within the group.
- Ask for assistance in distributing information to get the word out.
- Bring a few hard copies of the SM Connections handouts and brochures for the participants to review. They could either take hard copies to duplicate and distribute or you could send them the files by e-mail. For anyone who agrees to help, ask to be informed when a member sends information to an organizations, including the name and location of the organization and what information they sent to avoid duplication.

SMG~CAN

SM Connectons

Directions

**Enter the Name of the facility where you
Will be meeting**

**Enter address and
phone number of facility**

Write directions to facility:

From the North:

From the South:

From the East:

From the West:

The Selective Mutism Group is a division of the 501(c) 3, nonprofit organization, the Childhood Anxiety Network, Inc.
(SMG~CAN)

_____ Your address

_____ Phone

_____ email

SMG~CAN

SM Connections

Family Network

Support Group

Selective Mutism Group ~ Childhood Anxiety Network

We are a group of people, parents, and professionals dedicated to the research of Selective Mutism and to offering support and information to parents and treating professionals of Selectively Mute children.

Selective Mutism is a childhood anxiety disorder characterized by a child's inability to speak in various social settings due to severe anxiety.

It is a child "Suffering in Silence"

Enter where group will meet

Enter address
Phone number of
Where facility is located

**Enter Date and
Time of group meeting**

It is a goal of SMG~CAN to build a network of families in _____ (State) to share mutual experiences, promote community awareness and help each other with the day to day ups and downs of selective mutism.

Contact: **enter your name:** SM Connections State of (enter your state) Coordinator for
The Selective Mutism Group ~ Childhood Anxiety Network.

Please call or email if you wish to join us.

Enter your e-mail address and/or enter your telephone number.

Directions: **Either include or say call me or e-mail me**

