

From a SM Child's Perspective

My name is Cheyenne. I am 4 ½ years old and I have a social anxiety disorder along with selective mutism. This means that I am unable to speak in select social settings, such as school, dance class, or doctor's offices. I have a FEAR of speaking and being in social interactions where there is an expectation to talk. However, I am very smart and able to talk normally in settings where I am very comfortable, secure and relaxed, like at home or with my close relatives.

I take medicine every day to help me, but there are still things that will help me be more comfortable such as ...

- Interact with me in an informal manner, with as little eye contact as possible.
- **NEVER** make me feel as though you are 'waiting' for me to speak. This expectation is anxiety provoking. In addition, it is important to not make a 'big deal' over any verbalization that does occur. I might speak to a peer before a teacher. In this case, do not make mention that you 'hear' my voice. I may pull away when that approach is taken!
- Don't call out my name or draw unnecessary attention to me. If you are happy with something I am doing, say something generic like "I love how kids are putting away their toys".
- I can sometimes be sensitive to loud noises or overwhelmed by lots of chaos. Keeping things as routine and predictable as possible will help me to know what's expected.
- I sometimes have difficulty perceiving social situations and knowing how others feel. You can help me by using words to explain how you feel not just facial expressions and body language. Also be very concrete. Sometimes, I don't understand abstract language.
- If you must ask me a question, try to form it in a "yes" or "no" format. Instead of saying, "What's your favorite color?" You might say, "Is purple your favorite color?"

For more information you can go to www.selectivemutism.org.