

10 Stages in the Emergence of Speaking at School

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The following outlines the stages through which children with selective mutism typically move as they become more comfortable speaking across settings. Based on our clinical experience, the majority of children with selective mutism speak to peers prior to speaking to school personnel (as represented in the table below). However, in some instances, a child may speak to school staff before comfortably speaking to peers.

	Stage	Description
1	Complete Mutism at School	Child speaks at home but is silent at school. Appears anxious at school and may resist attending.
2	Relaxed Nonverbal Participation	Child speaks at home but not at school. Begins relaxing and participating nonverbally in classroom activities. May begin to talk positively about school.
3	Speaking to Parent at School	When alone with parent, where students and teachers cannot hear or see, the child speaks at school, often in a whispered voice.
4	Speaking Observed by Peers	Child speaks at school, usually to a parent. Peers observe but do not hear the child speaking.
5	Speaking Overheard by Peers	Child speaks at school, usually to a parent. Other children observe and hear the child speaking. Child does not speak directly to other children or teachers.
6	Child Speaks Through Parent to Peers	Child speaks to parent who conveys message to another child sitting nearby. The other child may overhear the child speaking and respond directly.
7	Child Speaks to Peers	Child speaks at school to one peer, often on the playground. Child does not speak to teachers.
8	Speaking to Several Peers	Child speaks to several children at school. Child does not speak to teachers.
9	Speaking to Teacher	Child begins speaking to teacher and to several peers.
10	Normal Speaking	Child speaks to most adults and peers in a normal conversational tone.