



Special Education for the child with selective mutism: Where do I start?

The federal government is supposed to insure that public schools provide a FAPE – Free and Appropriate Public Education for children with disabilities.

Children that suffer with selective mutism may need special accommodations to cope in school.

Upon entrance into a public school or at any time during school, a child suspected to have a disability can be referred for a full and individual evaluation. The parent, teacher or other individual may make the referral to the school district.

The #1 reason kids with SM are mistreated and misevaluated in schools is the adults do not understand SM. As a parent, you have the opportunity to provide them with information. – go to www.selectivemutism.org and print out articles, order books, etc. (Selective Mutism Educational Rights the CD is a good resource to start with.)

Parents are often very intimidated in going through this special education process. There are several things you can do to help yourself:

1. Learn about the process at www.advocacyinc.org Click on education and then click on handouts. The “ED2 – Still A Good Idea” is an excellent and easy to read resource. You can order it or read it on their website.
2. Start a notebook now. Write down who you spoke to, when you spoke to them, etc. www.advocacyinc.org also has information on how to create a parent’s notebook. See www.wrightslaw.com
3. Try to find a person in the district that knows you and your child. The process is much easier if someone on the inside really wants to help.

Important Terms

IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Other Health Impairment

IEP - Individual Education Plan

Section 504

Accommodations are needed for the child to succeed in the classroom and in his/her future

life. Under the U.S. federal law, the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**,

these children qualify for services based upon the fact that they have an impairment that hinders their ability to speak, thus disrupting their education. Children with SM receiving services under IDEA should be classified under the category of **Other Health Impaired (OHI)**. Appropriate accommodations and services need to be provided by the school. This assistance is typically documented in the form of an **Individual Educational Plan (IEP)**, which lists goals and objectives for the child and provides a way to track the child's progress within the designated program. Parent input is critical during the IEP process also.

Under another law, **Section 504** of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, public school districts are required to provide a free, appropriate public education to every "qualified handicapped person" residing within their jurisdiction. If the child is found to have impairments that substantially limit a major life activity (in this case, learning), the education agency has to decide what related aids or services are required to provide equal access to the learning environment. The law states that the child's education must be provided in the regular classroom with supplementary aids and services if at all possible. The school or school district generates a Section 504 Accommodation Plan every year that outlines the child's needs and the exact accommodations/modifications requested. The child's needs and exactly what accommodations/modifications are requested. Unlike IDEA, Section 504 does not guarantee that a child with a disability will receive an individualized educational program that is designed to meet the child's individual educational needs.

Selective Mutism IEP Classifications

Specify one of the following disabilities: autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impaired, learning disability, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, **other health-impairment, speech or language impairment**, traumatic brain injury or visual impairment including blindness. *These disabilities are defined in section 200.1(zz) of the Regulations of the Commissioner.*

Children with selective mutism may be classified under 3 different categories:

1. **Other Health Impairment** – This is the choice that SMG~CAN recommends. Selective Mutism is a neurological and biochemical health issue.
2. **Emotional Disturbance** – Usually this classification is given by a school psychologist. The label may have adverse effects on your child's permanent school file.
3. **Speech or Language Impairment** – This classification may given in an attempt to define Selective Mutism as a communication disorder instead of or in conjunction with an articulation disorder or language disorder. Auditory Processing difficulties can also be defined in this area.

Interesting Tips

1. Most SLP's, speech and language professionals, aren't sure how selective mutism fits into their area of expertise. You can go to the American Speech and Hearing Association website and print out a current article on SM. www.asha.org Type in "selective mutism" in the search box. Pull up the article dated 11 August 2004. It

tells a speech and language professional how to evaluate a child with selective mutism. Give this article to your school.

2. Because a lack of education on SM is a major cause for child, parent and teacher stress, you can ask the school to train their personnel. Write in the IEP a stipulation to purchase the necessary training and/or materials for their staff. This may include sending staff to a conference, buying a book or consulting with an independent therapist. Specify exactly what you mean and the date by which this must be completed. You can quote this with your request as your legal right to request it: 20 U.S.C. 1414(d)(1)(A) sets forth the components that must be included in an IEP. The third subsection provides:
 - a. "(iii) a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, **and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child—**
 - b. (I) to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals;
 - c. (II) to be involved and progress in the general curriculum in accordance with clause (i) and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and
 - d. (III) to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and nondisabled children in the activities described in this paragraph;..."
3. If you want to get an evaluation or you already have an evaluation from outside of the school district, it's important to note that the school can completely reject the evaluation. They are only required to review it. You can ask the district who they suggest as an evaluator. Here's the sticking point: it's doubtful any evaluator the school district recommends will have any training or experience in SM. You can call all of them and ask them what they know about SM. The SMG~CAN suggests the following:
 - a. It is important to have your child evaluated by someone who is very familiar with selective mutism or at least experienced in the diagnosis and treatment of anxiety disorders in children. Here are a few tips on searching in your area:
 - i. To search your local area, you can start by asking your pediatrician if he or she can help with a referral to a child psychologist, psychiatrist or clinical social worker that specializes in treating anxiety disorders in children. You can also ask for a recommendation from your child's school, your insurance company, or from your state and local professional organizations as well as any nearby children's hospitals.
 - ii. Once you obtain a list of doctors, you will want to call and ask about their experience in treating selective mutism or social anxiety in children, how many children they have treated, if they were successful, and what treatment methods are used.
 - iii. Key questions to ask are:
 1. What are your areas of expertise?
 2. Have you ever treated a child with Selective Mutism? If so, how many and what are your success rates?

3. What are your views on Selective Mutism? In other words, what are some of the reasons a child manifests mutism?
 4. What is your treatment approach to Selective Mutism?
 5. What will be my role as a parent?
 6. Will you involve my child's teacher and school in the treatment plan?
 7. What is your opinion on medication in treating SM and when do you consider medication?
 8. Can you supply me with references of families whom you have worked with?
- iv. When speaking to potential treating professionals, please be cautious of those who view SM as 'controlling' or 'manipulative' behavior. Recommendations of the use of punishment for not speaking, or attempts to force a child to speak, are inappropriate treatment methods and will only heighten a child's anxiety.

Advocacy Help

<http://www.nclid.unco.edu/HVoriginals/Advocacy/Popup/popup.html>

wrightslaw.com

advocacyincorporated.org

www.taalliance.org/centers/index/htm

www.thearcofgreaterhouston.com