



Planning for the End of the School Year

Believe it or not, the end of the school year will soon be upon us! This is the time to start thinking and talking with your child's school about how to make the transition to next year as smooth as possible.

Important accommodations for children with selective mutism include the following:

1. The student should be paired thoughtfully (and with input from parents) with next year's teacher. An accepting, flexible teacher is a good fit.
2. If possible, the student should be placed in a class with at least one close friend.
3. The student should spend as much time as possible with next year's teacher, both at the end of this year and over the summer (especially just prior to the start of next year).
4. Access to the school environment over the summer (playground, building, classroom) will help the child feel more comfortable and may promote speaking throughout the school.

Often, schools are not able to develop class lists until the summer, meaning that it will be impossible to know who the child's next teacher is prior to end of this school year. In that case, it would be helpful for your child to spend some time with each possible teacher now, and then plan time with the assigned teacher just prior to the start of next year.

Ideas for acclimating the child to his/her new classroom and teacher include the following. Consider what combination of techniques might be the best fit for your child, taking into account what has worked for your child in the past, what the teacher and school are willing to do, and how much time you have:

1. Teacher visits student's home, where student is most comfortable and likely to speak. Follow up visits occur at school.
2. Student and teacher first speak on the phone, then move interactions to school.

3. School visits (with or without teacher) may start on the playground, then move into a neutral zone such as the gym, then finally move to the classroom.
4. Student and a parent spend time alone in the classroom first, just playing or having relaxed exploration/conversation. Teacher joins by “sliding in” slowly, either over the course of one session or several.
5. If the student is speaking to current teacher, s/he serves as the bridge to communication with the new teacher as in #4 above.
6. For the first week(s) of school, the student comes in early, helping the teacher get ready for the day and/or engaging in structured play to help shape interaction towards verbal communication.

As always, it is tremendously helpful to work with a mental health professional that specializes in SM so that he or she can assist in developing an appropriate plan for your child to transition to next year. Please visit our website, www.selectivemutism.org, for links to treating professionals, state coordinators, and many other valuable resources, including books and articles.

Good luck to you as you close out this year and prepare for another, complete with all of its challenges and triumphs!

Alison L. Miller, Psy.D.

Licensed Psychologist and member of SMG Board of Directors