



Helping Others Understand Your Child

Many parents aren't sure how to communicate with family and friends about their child with Selective Mutism, yet wish that others could understand and offer support. In this month's SMG Connection, we offer the letter below as one option to communicate and share information relating to SM and your child. Please feel free to personalize it to your child's unique needs.

Dear Family and Friends,

You may have noticed that it is difficult for _____ to speak to you, and sometimes even for him/her to respond to you at all! _____ has an anxiety disorder called Selective Mutism – while he/she can speak comfortably at home or with immediate family, he/she is unable in other social situations (especially school and in public). This behavior is not normal shyness, stubbornness, or defiance; instead, it is a fear of other people hearing his/her voice. It doesn't develop from abuse, bad parenting, or trauma - it has a biological basis like many anxiety disorders.

I am so happy that you are part of _____'s life, and the good news is that there are things you can do to help!

- Be warm and caring toward _____. Please love and accept him/her unconditionally. Know that although he/she cannot yet, he/she wants to speak to you
- Give _____ time to warm up when you first see him/her. It may take _____ longer to warm up than other children, and during this time it is helpful not to ask direct questions. Instead, feel free to play with _____, comment on what he/she is doing, and give quiet praise.
- When you have time, playing or interacting with _____ in a one-on-one basis is likely the best way to relate to him/her....and it's in these moments that he/she might be more likely to talk to you!
- After the warm-up time, look for opportunities to ask him/her a question. Give _____ five seconds to think about his/her responses and build up his/her bravery. _____ is not ignoring you or being rude – he/she is simply building up confidence.
- You can reword questions if _____ isn't able to answer you. For example, you could

ask the question as a forced choice question (“Which snack do you want – an

apple or an orange?") or a yes/no question ("Do you want an apple?") instead of an open-ended question ("What do you want to eat?").

- If _____ does talk, please don't make a big deal out of it.
- Please don't try to bribe _____ to talk. It usually doesn't work and can put a lot of extra pressure on him/her.

It's not always easy when others don't understand _____'s diagnosis, and you could be a huge support to us as parents by:

- Understanding that this condition is not due to bad parenting – we are doing the best we can! It also can't be changed by discipline or harsh correcting, which is why we don't use those strategies.
- Understanding that generally kids don't grow out of it, which is why we are seeking professional help for the Selective Mutism. Please support us in that.
- Do say that you care and ask how you can help!

_____ is currently involved in therapy to learn how to be braver or stronger, and is working hard! If you would like to learn more about Selective Mutism, visit www.selectivemutism.org. Thank you for caring about _____!

Sincerely,