

Selective Mutism

Selective Mutism is an anxiety disorder which impacts a child's comfort communicating with individuals (peers and/or adults) in "select" settings despite comfort verbally communicating in other settings.

Common Myths About SM

SHY

SM is more than being shy. Symptoms are not outgrown and can have significant impacts on a child's day to day functioning.

OPPOSITIONAL

SM is an anxiety disorder. Children are not being defiant or oppositional but experience significant anxiety around speaking.

TRAUMA

SM is not caused by a traumatic event. It is an anxiety disorder.

AUTISM

SM and Autism are two separate disorders but can co-occur. Children with SM may struggle with social communication in some but not all settings.

LISTEN FOR:

- Limited Speech in Less Comfortable Environments:** Child speaks comfortably at home but is minimally verbal or nonverbal in settings like school or the community.
- Atypical Vocal or Physical Responses:** When expected to speak, may whisper, speak robotically, or appear "frozen" or withdrawn.
- Persistent Symptoms:** Behaviors have lasted more than one month.
- Functional Impact:** Symptoms lead to difficulties participating in classroom activities, social interactions, and/or community engagement.

1 IN 140

SM impacts approximately **1 in 140 children.** Symptoms can persist into adulthood.



QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Does your child's communication change depending on location and in what way?
- Who are some people your child will speak verbally to with/without you present?
- Does your child use other ways to communicate (e.g., writing, gestures)?
- Has your child shared what they think about their communication (e.g., "I just don't talk at school.")?

IF CONCERNS WITH SM ARE PRESENT:

- Ask questions to gain an understanding of the child's communication and functioning.
- Speak with the family about concerns and define SM.
- Share resources below to increase caregiver knowledge and understanding.
- Support the family in referral to a professional knowledgeable about SM treatment (providers can be found in the Treating Professional Directory).
- Speak with the family about possible need for school-based supports and refer them to the Educators' Toolkit and webcourses for more information on SM support in schools.
- Consider if further evaluation is needed for proper diagnosis and treatment recommendations.

INTERVENTION FOR SM

Research-based treatment options include behavioral and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), medication, and speech-language therapy. All treatments should be pursued under the care of an experienced professional.

ROLE OF MEDICATION IN SM TREATMENT

- Medication may be indicated in some cases to treat SM as an ADJUNCT to therapy. Medication can lower anxiety enough to allow the child to participate more effectively in the treatment process and to treat comorbid disorders.
- Two major studies have shown that medication alone will only reduce symptoms of anxiety by 40-50%; while using medication in conjunction with ongoing therapy can reduce symptoms by 80-90% (TADS 2007, CAMS 2010).
- **Common Medications:**
 - SSRIs are most commonly used when treating SM/anxiety in children and adolescents. (Fluoxetine and Sertraline are available in liquid formulations for those that cannot swallow pills).
- **Indications for Medication Use:**
 - Longstanding symptoms
 - Co-morbid anxiety disorders
 - Strong family history
 - Significant interference with functioning
- **Dosing Guidelines:**
 - Start at the lowest dose (sometimes half of the lowest dose)
 - Gradually titrate up over the course of 4-6 weeks as needed.
- **Monitoring and Safety:**
 - Thoroughly discuss the BLACK BOX WARNING and other possible side effects with families.
 - Monitor mood/behavioral changes and immediately report concerns to prescribing physician if observed.
- **Duration and Discontinuation:**
 - Aim for maximum benefits from medication for 12-24 months, then consider a gradual wean.
 - Gradually taper medications over 4-6 weeks; never stop abruptly.

RESOURCES



Visit the Selective Mutism Association for:

- Selective Mutism Caregiver Toolkit
- Selective Mutism Educators' Toolkit
- Treating Provider Directory
- Access to Free Webinars
- And Many More Resources



www.selectivemutism.org

The Selective Mutism Association (SMA) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization dedicated to providing information, resources and support to those impacted by a child with the anxiety disorder known as selective mutism.

Whether you are a parent of a child with SM, a teacher, a therapist, a physician, an individual with SM, or anyone interested in learning more, SMA can help. We are the nation's premier resource for SM information and we provide a network of families and treating professionals around the world who uniquely understand the struggles of SM. Stop struggling alone. Start seeking information and support today.

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