

Recorded Bundle for Individuals with SM (Ages 17 and Older)

Anxiety, Avoidance, and Finding your Voice

Katelyn Reed, M.S., Erin Glow, B.A.

The Pressure to Say it Perfectly

Jennifer Garcia, Psy.D.

Shh, Don't Say That! A Discussion of Stigma Experienced by Individuals with Mental Health Challenges, and Strategies to Lower Stigma's Negative Impacts on Individuals with Selective Mutism

Vanessa Ng, Ph.D., Marisa Serchuk, Ph.D.

Anxiety Doesn't Get to Drive: CBT and ACT Skills for Doing Hard Things

Veronica Raggi, Ph.D. Courtney Keeton, Ph.D.

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Anxiety, Avoidance, and Finding your Voice

Katelyn Reed, M.S., Erin Glow, B.A.

Selective Mutism (SM) is widely misunderstood, leaving many struggling to find accurate information and effective support. This presentation explores the foundations of anxiety, the role of avoidance in maintaining fear, and why speaking in some situations can become so challenging for people with SM. Blending lived experience with clinical expertise, the presenters will dispel common myths, explain science-backed approaches to treatment, and provide a shared understanding of SM and anxiety that will help attendees engage more fully with the specialized topics and discussions throughout the rest of the conference.

The Pressure to Say it Perfectly

Jennifer Garcia, Psy.D.

While it is well-known that social fears are the most frequently reported fears of individuals with selective mutism, a significant subset of individuals with selective mutism present with fears surrounding making mistakes (Vogel et al., 2019). This perfectionism is a critical consideration in the treatment of selective mutism given exposure-based treatment is

(The Pressure to Say it Perfectly: continued)

most effective when it targets the core fears of the individual (Abramowitz et al., 2019). This focused address is designed to illuminate the relationship between perfectionism and selective mutism in digestible language for an audience of individuals with selective mutism, offering tools and guidance surrounding the pressure to say things perfectly. For example, by making mistakes on purpose, we open the door to an opportunity: to test whether our fear comes true or not, and if we can handle hard things. Creating a fear ladder, or a step-by-step guide to what's difficult or scary for us, helps us make change at a much steadier and thoughtful pace. Setting "SMART" goals further allows us to have clarity in the exact steps we need to take. Moreover, individuals will learn about how perfectionism may be inhibiting progress and growth, as well as what they can do to forego perfection in favor of stepping forward.

Shh, Don't Say That! A Discussion of Stigma Experienced by Individuals with Mental Health Challenges, and Strategies to Lower Stigma's Negative Impacts on Individuals with Selective Mutism

Vanessa Ng, Ph.D., Marisa Serchuk, Ph.D.

Experiencing stigma due to mental health challenges is generally well documented in the literature (e.g., articles in peer reviewed journals) and anecdotally (e.g., social media posts). Stigmatizing beliefs and actions can come from others, and for many individuals experiencing the stigmatization of others, they begin to agree with and internalize these harmful assumptions. Stigma experienced by young adults with mental health challenges have been found to have a range of negative impacts such as lower self-esteem and feelings of shame, less willingness to seek help (from parents, friends, teachers, doctors, etc.), increased feelings of isolation, difficulties with academic/work performance, and more. Research has identified various effective strategies that can help reduce stigma towards mental health challenges and harmful related impacts, for general and specific populations. Two of the most powerful stigma-reduction strategies identified in the research include educating others about the stigmatized mental health challenge, such as selective mutism (SM), and others meeting people with SM. Due to inadequate research and a history of inaccurate explanations, people with SM and their families are often misunderstood. To this date, there is a lack of research specifically examining stigma experiences for individuals with SM to the author's knowledge. The current discussion hopes to bridge this gap. We will begin by providing an overview of a framework that is helpful for understanding the process of stigma, with a focus on 3 forms (public stigma, self-stigma, and courtesy/vicarious stigma). We will then aim to adapt empirically-based stigma-reduction approaches created for individuals with mental health challenges in general, to practical strategies for individuals with SM.

Anxiety Doesn't Get to Drive: CBT and ACT Skills for Doing Hard Things

Veronica Raggi, Ph.D. Courtney Keeton, Ph.D.

Living a meaningful life does not require controlling or getting rid of anxiety. For individuals with selective mutism and social anxiety, growth often begins by learning how to show up for important moments, relationships, and opportunities even when anxiety is present. This presentation will introduce practical Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) strategies that help individuals move from avoidance and resistance, which often increase suffering, to greater willingness, self-compassion, and participation in valued life activities. Participants will learn skills for noticing anxious thoughts without becoming entangled in them, using mindfulness and present-moment awareness to stay engaged, building tolerance for uncertainty, identifying personally meaningful values and goals, and taking small, achievable steps despite discomfort. Through concrete examples and experiential exercises, attendees will gain tools to respond more flexibly to anxiety and build a fuller, more connected life, one courageous step at a time.