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- Email ececustomerservice@continued.com
Knowledge Check

After this course you will be able to answer the following question:

What is the best type of question for children with Selective Mutism?

a) Forced-choice
b) Yes/no
c) Feelings question
d) Open-ended

Unlocking the Mystery of Selective Mutism

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Licensed Psychologist
Learner Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- List the key characteristics of selective mutism.
- Produce the avoidance cycle of selective mutism.
- Explain the two main intervention techniques to help children with selective mutism.

History of Selective Mutism

- Aphasia Voluntaria 1877
- Elective Mutism 1934
- Selective Mutism 1994
Definition of SM (DSM-5)

- Specific anxiety disorder
- Consistent, ongoing failure to speak in specific social situations, especially school
- Not due to a primary language disorder
- Other disorders (e.g., stuttering, autism) have been ruled out
- A relatively rare childhood disorder, affecting approximately 1% of children in elementary school settings
- Behavior is deliberate self-protection, not deliberate oppositionality

Common Characteristics

- Mutism
- Blank facial expression, freezing, poor eye contact
- Difficulty responding and/or initiating nonverbally
- Slow to respond
- Heightened sensitivity
- Excessive worries
- Oppositional/bossy/inflexible behavior at home
- Intelligent
- Bilingual
How Does SM Originate?

- NO evidence of causal relationship to abuse, neglect, or trauma
- Genetic predisposition model (genetic loading)
- Biological indicators
  - Decreased threshold of excitability in amygdala
  - Amygdala reacts more and takes longer to return to normal

Most recent stats show approximately 1%....and growing?

Prevalence

1.5-2.6 / 1 female / male

**Coexisting Problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Phobia</th>
<th>Defiance/Oppositionality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>Enuresis</td>
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<td>Other Specific Phobias</td>
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<td>Obsessive Compulsive Characteristics</td>
<td>Separation Anxiety</td>
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<td>Speech Problems (35-75%)</td>
<td>Hearing Issues</td>
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**Selective Mutism Subtypes**

- Anxious
- Anxious/Opposition
- Anxious/Communication Delayed
Conceptualizing Selective Mutism

Evidence-Based Intervention

For teachers and caregivers
First Thing
First – Warm Up and Develop Rapport

- PRIDE skills play
  - P = labeled praise
  - R = reflection
  - I = imitation
  - D = behavioral description
  - E = excitement/enjoyment

- NO asking questions, giving commands, or teaching!!!
Two types of desensitization

1. Stimulus fading
2. Shaping (communication ladder)

Stimulus Fading

- Gradually increasing the number of different people the child speaks to and settings the child speaks in
  - Gradually introducing new people into conversations
  - Speaking in new settings with the help of stimulus associated with speaking (e.g., communication ladders with speaking partner or keyworker)
Types of Questions

Yes/No

Forced Choice

Open Ended

Stay away from:
- Complex questions
- Really open ended questions
- Feelings questions

Forced-Choice Question

Verbal Response
- Labeled Praise

No Response
- Wait 5 sec, repeat question

Non-verbal Response
- Wait 5 sec, probe for verbal
  - Verbal response
  - No response or nonverbal
    - Labeled praise
    - Wait 5 sec, reduce expectations
Only Change One Factor at a Time

Changing too many, especially at first, increases anxiety and is likely to lead to regression.

Speech Shaping

- Pointing, gestures, nodding/shaking head
- Following directions
- Blowing air
- Voiceless sounds
- Voiced sounds
If Child Doesn’t Answer….

- **Wait**: Wait 5 seconds, and ask again
- **Ask**: Ask differently
- **Plan**: Plan B (make it simpler)
- **Reinforce**: Reinforce bravery (not avoidance)
- **Practice**: Practice beforehand
- **Prepare**: Prepare kids mentally
Contingency Management (AKA Reinforcement)

- Child avoids talking = reduction of anxiety = negative reinforcement
  - Child is more likely to avoid speaking
- Goal – making nonverbal communication less reinforcing and verbal communication more reinforcing
  - No longer accepting nonverbal gestures as a response
  - Not answering for the child
  - Stop avoiding asking the child questions
  - Providing positive reinforcement following verbalizations (e.g., praise, stickers, points, toys)

Tips for Encouraging Speech

- REMAIN CALM!!!
- Use specific praise
- Judicious use of direct prompts to speak
- Brave talking is target behavior, not correctness
- Always wait 5 seconds for reply – child needs opportunity to respond
- Try to always ask forced-choice or open ended questions instead of yes/no questions (to avoid head-shaking)
- Use situations that are motivationally driven to encourage more speech
- Don’t mind read
Specific School Interventions

- Desensitization in school with keyworker
  - 5-10 minutes of practice daily or 15 minutes 3x/wk
  - As structured as possible
  - Team meetings and communication

- Chores that involve speech

- Extracurriculars

- Seating arrangement/small group activities

- Conversational partners/conversational visits

- At-school practices during summer

- Meet with teacher prior to new school year

- Anticipating problems/obstacles/changes

- Discuss anxiety-provoking transitions in advance

References/Resources


Knowledge Check

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