An information sheet for parents and professionals

SELECTIVE MUTISM IS A PHOBIA

Selective mutism is a phobia of talking to certain people in certain situations.

This understanding is central to successful treatment. As with all phobias:

1 Phobias can be overcome

So relax and let children who have selective mutism know you have complete confidence that they will conquer their fear of talking.

2 Phobias are common and nothing to be ashamed of

It helps when people talk openly and non-judgementally about fear and we know what we're dealing with – it's not 'just the way we are'.

3 Applying pressure makes phobias worse

Phobic individuals can't be rushed, and any use of force, disapproval, unrealistic targets or bribery will simply raise their anxiety levels even higher.

4 Facing fears is the key to success

The most successful way to overcome a phobia is to gradually face the fear *at your own pace*. So, after *initially* removing all pressure to talk, we help children *gradually* participate in conversations, one small step at a time. It's like leaving the light on when a child is afraid of the dark, and gradually darkening the room, using a dimmer switch.

5 Avoidance is not an option

The longer you put off facing your fear, the stronger it becomes and the better avoidance feels. So we must find ways to make difficult situations more manageable, rather than avoiding them altogether.

6 Confidence has a ripple effect

Nurture a positive self-image, anxiety-coping strategies and courage!

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PHOTOCOPIABLE
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