

# Selective Mutism: *A resource guide for Speech- Language Pathologists, Psychologists, Teachers, and Parents*



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# Introduction

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<https://selectivemutismcenter.org/whatisselectivemutism/>

Selective Mutism is part of a complex social anxiety disorder. It is characterized by a child's *inability* to speak and communicate effectively in certain social settings, such as at school, but the *ability* to speak and communicate effectively in other social settings, such as at home. As you can imagine, this disorder has an enormous impact on the child's social-emotional development as well as their ability to perform in educational settings. These children have a tremendous amount of anxiety around speaking in certain situations, and it is important to handle these children with care. Unfortunately, actions from well-intentioned helpers sometime contribute to an increase in the child's stress and anxiety around communication resulting in the child becoming mute in all settings, not just a select few. The purpose of creating this resource guide was to raise awareness about this specific and tricky disorder area and give some helpful tips and resource links in order to help fellow speech-language pathologists, teachers, educational support staff, parents and peers make sense of this complicated disorder and treat it accordingly.

**CHAPTER 1:** What is selective mutism? What should I be looking for in my child or student? What are its implications?

**CHAPTER 2:** How do I assess a child with selective mutism? What else should I be looking for?

**CHAPTER 3:** I've identified the child and they've been assessed...*NOW* what can I do?

- a) SLP
- b) Teacher
- c) Psychologist
- d) Parent

**CHAPTER 4:** How are we going to achieve the best outcomes for this child?

- a) (Hint: work in a team!)

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## Chapter 1: What is selective mutism? What should I be looking for in my students? What are the implications?

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In order to effectively raise awareness and increase understanding of selective mutism, one needs to understand that exactly the disorder is and what to look for in each child. The following resources are excellent educational resources that help explain the disorder and its implications.

**Website:** <https://selectivemutismcenter.org/whatisselectivemutism/>

- A comprehensive overview from the “selective mutism, anxiety and related disorders treatment center”. Most important sections for *this* chapter:
  - o What is selective mutism?
  - o Why does a child develop selective mutism?
  - o Behaviour characteristics in social settings
  - o 14 most common characteristics of selective mutism
  - o Why so few teachers, therapist, physicians understand Selective mutism
  - o Why it is so important to have these children diagnosed young (implications of a late diagnosis)

**Website:** <https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/selective-mutism>

- An overview of the disorder from “AnxietyBC”, an association whose mission is to promote awareness of anxiety disorders and give access to evidence-based resources and treatment. Most important sections for *this* chapter:
  - o What is selective mutism?
  - o How do I know if my child has selective mutism?
  - o Facts about selective mutism
  - o What causes selective mutism/what maintains it? (An easy to read diagram is included!)

**Blog:**

<https://leannesselectivemutismawarenessmonthblogs.wordpress.com/2016/10/01/what-is-selective-mutism/>

- A blog written by a woman who has lived with selective mutism. A first-hand experience of what it feels like to be affected by this disorder and its massive impact.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/learn/what-is-selective-mutism/>

- An overview of the disorder from the “selective mutism organization”, an organization who wants to increase public awareness and promote greater understanding of this disorder.

**Blog:**

<https://leannessselectivemutismawarenessmonthblogs.wordpress.com/2016/10/31/please-dont-refuse-to-give-any-treats-to-the-child-who-doesnt-say-trick-or-treat-they-may-have-selective-mutism/>

- A blog about what it feels like to have selective mutism and its implications during regular childhood activities.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3GQe7WCgsQ>

- A TedTalk from an educator in New York and New Jersey about selective mutism and its impact in the classroom who's daughter had selective mutism. She outlines her story (very relatable for parents!) and explains the importance of raising awareness of the disorder and its implications if it continues to be overlooked. A great advocacy video!

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=alrDeBoUGIE>

- A video by "Child Psychology" explaining what selective mutism is and its effects on a child. Very brief and to the point, a quick way to educate others!

**News article:** <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33507287>

- An article about selective mutism about a woman who has suffered from selective mutism her entire life. She outlines the impact it has had on her in day to day life.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/guide/teachers-guide-to-selective-mutism/what-is-not-sm/>

- As important as it is to properly identify what *IS* selective mutism, it is equally important to recognize what is *NOT* selective mutism. This is a resource from the Child Mind Institute in New York that outlines certain conditions that tend to get mistaken for selective mutism, or vice versa.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/article/myths-about-selective-mutism/>

- A resource from the Child Mind Institute in New York that dispels common misconceptions about children with selective mutism. Debunking myths is an important part of raising awareness!

**ABC News Clip:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5O4udVIWJA>

- A case study news clip from ABC news about selective mutism and its implications on the featured child's day to day life. A great step to raising awareness – having a segment featured on ABC news! This is a good video to show to someone who isn't sure what selective mutism is and how it differs from shyness.

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## Chapter 2: How do I assess a child with selective mutism? What else should I be looking for?

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Children with selective mutism can be very tricky to assess, and sometimes there is more going on than only anxiety (for example, there could be an underlying developmental language disorder (DLD) that is impacting communication too). This chapter contains resources on how to assess a child with selective mutism.

**Website:**

<http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942812&section=Assessment>

- The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) provides some recommendations for speech-language pathologists about assessing a child with selective mutism. This document includes areas to include in your comprehensive assessment and suggestions on how to make the most of your assessment time with the child.

**Website:** <https://selectivemutismcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Assessments.pdf>

- A resource from the Selective Mutism Anxiety Research and Treatment Center regarding what the different types of assessment entail and the benefits of psychological assessment for children with Selective Mutism. The question and answer format of the document makes it a great resource to hand out to parents.

**Research Article:** <https://selectivemutismcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Assessing-Spoken-Language-Competence-in-Children-with-Selective-Mutism.pdf>

- A research article about the effectiveness of parent training to administer standardized language tests to children with selective mutism. The results suggest that professionally administered tests tend to underestimate their expressive language abilities, but findings also suggested that even with parent administered tests, some of the children's narrative abilities were *still* below expectations. The discussion is especially relevant for SLPs working in an educational setting.

**Research Article:** <http://www.lldsig.com/userimages/selective%20mutism%20a.pdf>

- Pages 839-840 of the document relate to assessment. There is a handy chart on page 840 that outlines the different disciplines involved and what to investigate in both a parent interview and a clinical interview. Very handy to check for your roles and responsibilities in the assessment process.

**Research Article:** <https://files.acrobat.com/a/preview/6e6aa3ae-4b8c-42b2-bdb3-2899c2b1335d>

- A research article highlighting the teacher's role in the assessment of children with selective mutism. In the past, teachers have been left out of the assessment process, but research is showing that they are quite reliable with the information they can provide to the SLP. The article includes a teacher telephone interview handout on page 90.
  - o Martinez, Y. J., Tannock, R., Manassis, K., Garland, E. J., Clark, S., & McInnes, A. (2015). The teachers' role in the assessment of selective mutism and anxiety disorders. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology, 30*(2), 83-101. Doi: 10.1177/0829573514566377
    - In case you cannot access the article via the link, here is the citation to access the article through the database you have access to through your place of employment.

**Selective Mutism Questionnaire (SMQ):**

<http://www.oxfordclinicalpsych.com/view/10.1093/med:psych/9780195391527.001.0001/med-9780195391527-interactive-pdf-002.pdf>

- The "Selective Mutism Questionnaire" (SMQ) to hand out to parents to help in the assessment process.
  - o <http://pubmedcentralcanada.ca/pmcc/articles/PMC2925837/>
  - o The above is the research article outlining the validity of this questionnaire. The results indicate that it is an effective tool to include in your assessment (if in a hurry, focus your attention on the discussion!).

**Research Article:** <https://files.acrobat.com/a/preview/7233c549-b5e4-4c89-b22f-78c1d41409a1>

- A research article that provides guidelines for assessing selective mutism in children who are acquiring a second language. The article aims to provide guidance for school professionals that are working with children that are demonstrating symptoms of selective mutism but are also acquiring English as their second language (a very tricky situation!).
  - o Mayworm, A. M., Dowdy, E., Knights, K., & Rebelz, J. (2015). Assessment and treatment of selective mutism with English language learners. *Contemporary School Psychology, 19*(3), 193-204. Doi: 10.1007/s40688-014-0035-5
    - In case you cannot access the article via the link, here is the citation to access the article through the database you have access to through your place of employment.

**Website:** <http://www.therapiesforkids.com.au/conditions/selective-mutism/>

- A website that highlights what is involved in an assessment and what information each part of the assessment hopes to ascertain. The "what we do" section would be handy to give to parents – it explains what information comes from each part of the assessment and then what they can expect once the assessment has been completed.

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## Chapter 3: I've identified the child and they've been assessed...NOW what can I do?

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There can be many different professionals working with a child who has selective mutism. Depending on your role, here are some resources to help you once the child has been assessed. Feel free to look at ALL the resources available here, as you never know when someone in a role separate from your own might need some guidance!

### As a Speech-Language Pathologist:

#### **Website:**

<http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942812&section=Treatment>

- ASHA provides various treatment approaches for an SLP working with this population. This document includes different service delivery suggestions, various treatment approaches and special considerations that are important when working with the children.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/learn/faq/how-is-selective-mutism-treated/>

- A resource from the selective mutism association. Of particular importance for a speech-language pathologist is the section on "Speech-Language Therapy". Some helpful hints are included as well as a sample hierarchy of treatment. Some suggestions on what to work on if there is a DLD as well as selective mutism are also included in this section.

**Blog:** <http://creativespeechlab.com/2016/04/05/the-role-of-the-slp-in-selective-mutism/>

- A blog post from a speech-language pathologist who worked with a child with selective mutism. She outlines the disorder and the role of the speech-language pathologist. She also provides suggestions for intervention.

**Research Study:** <http://www.banterspeech.com.au/selective-mutism/>

- An easy to read synopsis of a study carried out by "Banter" speech and language services in Australia. Provides easy to read and easy to understand presentation of the research findings, including what worked in the study and the bottom line for what it means for treatment as a speech-language pathologist.

**Blog:** <http://blog.slptoolkit.com/selectivemutism/>

- A blog from a speech-pathologist about treating children with selective mutism. An easy to understand diagram is included and the diagram is also associated with a sample hierarchy as a basis for the start of treatment.
  - o <https://s3.amazonaws.com/blog-photos1/SMgoals.pdf>
    - Sample goals and activities based on the framework provided in the diagram/hierarchy provided in the blog.
  - o <https://s3.amazonaws.com/blog-photos1/SMdata.pdf>



- Data collection chart based on the framework provided in the diagram/hierarchy in the blog.

**Resource:** <https://www.teacherspayteachers.com/Product/Exploring-Feelings-about-Speaking-for-Selective-Mutism-other-Speech-Disorders-1496156>

- A resource sold through “teachers pay teachers” to help you communicate with non-verbal children with selective mutism. Very reasonable in price and can be adapted to fit the needs of your caseload!

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IDoPYgi0wlw>

- A video from a child therapist based in the United Kingdom, highlighting how to use “shaping” intervention with a child with selective mutism. Includes an explanation of the technique, how to use it and develop a hierarchy, and some examples of how this therapist has utilized the technique in her practice.
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-EbBUmiOm0>
    - A continuation of the above video – how to move from the “shaping” intervention technique into conversational speech.

**Website:** <http://www.confidentchildren.co.uk/blank>

- A resource from a child therapist based in the United Kingdom. On her website, she provides games, books and resources as well as helpful videos for therapists working with children with selective mutism. Once you get into the specific resource you are looking for (i.e. games), she provides amazon links to purchase the resources you think will be helpful for your practice.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VccjN8ToxG4>

- A video with tips and tricks to build rapport with children with selective mutism before beginning therapy. Tips include activities and how to tailor your response for older and younger children as well.

*As a Teacher:*

**Letter Template:**

<https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/resources/documents/School%20Tips%20for%20Teachers%20of%20Children%20with%20Selective%20Mutism.pdf>

- A template of a letter that could be given to the classroom teacher. Includes a definition of what selective mutism is as well as tips on how to interact with the child to create a safe learning environment.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Do27LW5J-Gs>

- A video with tips on what you can do as a teacher when one of your students has selective mutism.



**Resource Handout:** <https://files.acrobat.com/a/preview/9ee2d311-b764-464f-8709-7ce92cc7d559>

- A handout tailored to teachers with information on what the condition is, strategies for outside the school and within the classroom, hierarchies of communication (based on difficulty), what you can tell their classmates and key behaviours to avoid.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yt2ZqN8akKc>

- A video with similar tips to the first video provided on what you can do as a teacher when one of your students has selective mutism.

**Fact sheet:** <http://m.kidshealth.org/en/parents/selective-mutism-factsheet.html>

- A fact sheet for teachers with a child with selective mutism in their classroom. Includes tips for positive interactions and different accommodations that may be necessary in the classroom.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/guide/teachers-guide-to-selective-mutism/sm-strategies-for-classroom/>

- A great resource for how to manage these children in a classroom setting from the Child Mind Institute in New York.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/guide/teachers-guide-to-selective-mutism/helping-new-student-diagnosed-with-sm/>

- The Child Mind institute provides suggestions for teachers when you are aware that a child has struggled with selective mutism in the past and will be entering your classroom. It has some tips on what you can do to help the previously identified child be more comfortable with you and your classroom.

**Website:** <https://www.education.udel.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/SelectiveMutism.pdf>

- A handout for teachers with different strategies for how to interact with a child with selective mutism and how to promote communication within the classroom.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/sample-page/im-an-educator/>

- An article from the selective mutism association with common questions and answers from educators that come after a selective mutism diagnosis.

As a Psychologist:

**Case Study:** <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/shyness-is-nice/201610/understanding-and-treating-selective-mutism>

- A case study from a psychologist's point of view with treatment based on a behaviour hierarchy. The case study shares some experiences, tips and a sample hierarchy you could use as a basis for starting treatment.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/learn/faq/how-is-selective-mutism-treated/>

- A resource from the selective mutism association. Of particular importance to psychologists, the section on cognitive and behaviour strategies. The strategies are described and instructions on how they will be carried out are included.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/article/brave-talking-helps-kids-conquer-mutism/>

- A program run through the Child Mind Institute in New York. A clinical psychologist is involved in this evidence based treatment approach. The program runs out of the institute in New York, but could potentially be adapted or the underlying principles may be useful for the psychologist involved with the child's case.

*As a Parent:*

**Website:** <https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/my-anxiety-plan-selective-mutism>

- An outline that can be used by parents at home to help supplement work done in therapy. "My Anxiety Plan" or "MAP" includes strategies to help the parent and child work together to address selective mutism. Education about the disorder and various strategies are outlined through this site and its various links.

**Website:** <https://childmind.org/article/selective-mutism-during-holidays/>

- A short article from the Child Mind Institute in New York that highlights a couple things parents can do to help their child with selective mutism be successful during the holiday season. These tips could be generalized to other large family gatherings as well.

**Website:** <https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/dos-and-donts-for-parents-of-children-with-selective-mutism-1103155>

- An article with a helpful list of DO's and DON'T's for parents of children with selective mutism, with explanations for why certain actions should or should not be continued.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/sample-page/im-a-parent/>

- An article from the selective mutism association with common questions and answers from parents that come after a selective mutism diagnosis.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/learn/recommended-reading-list/recommended-reading-for-parents/>

- A list of different books and resources manuals compiled by the Selective Mutism Association that are useful for parents. These books are available for purchase through the association.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0nohyMBixQ>

- A video from a mother of a girl with selective mutism. She outlines her story and how she has felt throughout the process of therapy with this particular therapist. It is a nice video (only 7 minutes) and could be useful to help parents know they are not alone and there are others going through it and achieving positive outcomes.

**Resource Guide:**

<http://www.cheo.on.ca/uploads/Selective%20Mutism/Selective%20Mutism%20ENG.pdf>

- A resource guide for parents/caregivers who have had their child diagnosed with selective mutism. Pay attention to sections:
  - o How can I help my child?
  - o What doesn't help
  - o The treatment approaches the professionals on your child's team will be using and how you as a parent will play an important role in it
  - o How to talk to friends and family about selective mutism (how you can train your family and friends!)
  - o Parenting styles
  - o Tips to reduce your child's anxiety
  - o Celebrating Success
  - o A personal step by step anxiety plan template to fill in with your child

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*Chapter 4: How can we work together to achieve the best outcomes for this child?*

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This final chapter includes resources that are relevant for everyone involved in the child's treatment. When you are aware of everyone on the child's team and their specific roles and responsibilities, you are better able to work together as a team and achieve the best outcomes possible for the child.

**Website:**

[http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942812&section=Roles\\_and\\_Responsibilities](http://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=8589942812&section=Roles_and_Responsibilities)

- This document from ASHA outlines the speech-language pathologist's roles and responsibilities with this population. A handy document to keep in mind when working in a team to ensure you remain within your scope of practice while still collaborating with other professionals involved with the child.

**Resource Guide:** [https://www.amazon.ca/Selective-Mutism-Resource-Manual-Speechmark-ebook/dp/B074CHZD4H/ref=pd\\_sim\\_351\\_3?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=ZFJKRQFNHKVSJY9QFHP6](https://www.amazon.ca/Selective-Mutism-Resource-Manual-Speechmark-ebook/dp/B074CHZD4H/ref=pd_sim_351_3?encoding=UTF8&psc=1&refRID=ZFJKRQFNHKVSJY9QFHP6)

- A resource guide on understanding, assessing and managing Selective Mutism. This is a resource for clinicians, educators, caseworkers and families. Everyone's role with the child is outlined in this manual, and it is available for purchase.

**Website:** <http://www.bcaslpa.ca/public/disorders/disorder-listing/selective-mutism/>

- A resource from the British Columbia college of speech-language pathologists and audiologists. It includes information on what professionals are involved with children with selective mutism and information for parents on when they should get help.

**Website:** <http://www.therapiesforkids.com.au/conditions/selective-mutism/>

- After the assessment section, this website outlines how everyone's different roles work together to create positive communication outcomes for the child with selective mutism. Handy information share with parents as well so they know they are part of the team as well!

**Video:** <http://selectivemutismlearning.org/selective-mutism-101/>

- A video providing education to parents, educators and speech-language pathologists. It is quite lengthy (1.5 hours), so you can watch at your leisure to learn about everyone's role or fast forward to the most important parts for your role in the treatment.

**Website:** <https://www.selectivemutism.org/sample-page/im-a-treating-professional/>

- A resource provided through the selective mutism association for treating professionals (psychologists and SLPs). The format of this resource is common questions and answers that pertain to both professions as they collaborate in the care for these children.

**Resource guide:**

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/5843/selectivemutismpracticeguidelines.pdf>

- A resource guide that puts everything covered in this resource guide together in one useful place. It includes information that is relevant and helpful to educators, SLPs, parents, etc. There are very helpful and useful appendixes are found in this document.

**Blog:** <https://www.selective-mutism.com/sm-resources/sm-resource-articles/28-selective-mutism-an-integrated-treatment-approach>

- A blog post about how everyone is involved in an integrated treatment approach for children with selective mutism.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzlhqoLZwNw>

- A video about the “Do’s and Don’t’s” for interacting with children with selective mutism. It is very important that EVERYONE involved with this child is on the same page when interacting with the child, so this video highlights some helpful tips for anyone involved in the team, and can be shown at a team meeting to ensure consistency amongst team members.

**Short Documentary:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwhbUcyKGDIV>

- A great summary video for this resource guide. It outlines what selective mutism is, its implications on this girl’s young life, how her parents, teachers therapist and friends played a role in her treatment.

**Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAkIXpykB5U>

- Another great summary video for this resource guide. It highlights what selective mutism is, the cycle of selective mutism, a step by step process of breaking this cycle and a few advocacy suggestions. Easy to understand examples of activities and different ways to challenge these children are also included. Narrated by parents, it is a very good summary video and could be useful to anyone working with a child with selective mutism (i.e. the parents of a child on your caseload, fellow professionals, etc.).