

Parent information on 'Reluctant Communicators'

What is it?

- A 'reluctant communicator' is a term used to describe those children who **can** talk comfortably in **some** situations, but **are silent in other situations**.

It can range from...



Children who are reluctant to speak in some situations but will do so

Children who are very quiet or perhaps use only short phrases (even though they are able to use longer ones).

Children who have elements of mutism where they are silent some of the time.

Children who are selectively mute

- This often occurs in new situations with less familiar adults.
- It is not bad behavior or normal shyness.
- It is a type of social anxiety whereby children fear others hearing their voice. Just like you would avoid spiders if you were afraid of them, children avoid talking because they're afraid of others hearing their voice.
- It is common for young children to be reluctant to communicate when they first start a new Early Years setting when they are first separated from their carers.
- Most children overcome this initial reluctance to talk and mix with others as they learn to trust the adults looking after them and get used to their new surroundings and any new people.
- If reluctance to communicate becomes more persistent and difficult to overcome, the child may require additional strategies to help them.
- A reluctance to communicate can affect their ability to make friends and succeed at school, and could lead to total speech avoidance if a child is simply left to 'grow out of it'.

What can you do to help?

General suggestions for supporting children who find talking difficult with certain people, or in certain situations are as follows:

- Accept that your child wants to speak, despite their silence, and are not being stubborn or deliberate.
- Do not resort to bribery, flattery, challenge, threats or gentle persuasion to elicit speech. This will increase anxiety.

- Openly acknowledge the child's problem in an accepting and relaxed way, while stressing that the situation is only temporary.
- Encourage communication in a relaxing atmosphere, with no pressure on the child to speak.
- Accept the child's efforts to communicate in a non-verbal way, such as when they use pointing.
- Praise any form of communication and participation in activities.
- Follow the child's lead. You may notice that your child is more talkative during certain tasks or activities.
- Provide extra time for your child to produce a response
- Limit the amount of direct questions and make statements/comments about what the child is doing instead. For example, instead of saying 'What did you have for dinner?' say 'I thought the stew was great today'. This will reduce the pressure of answering a question and reduce anxiety.
- Responding consistently to the child in the above way will help them to become a confident talker.

Who are the correct services to support the child?

- Educational Psychologists
- SOLAR Services

Speech and Language Therapists are not the professionals who are best to support reluctant communicators due to the anxiety relating factors; therefore the above professionals are the best to support children who are reluctant communicators.

Activities to increase confidence and independence in talking:

- Use loud instruments in music, encouraging communication through the instruments.
- Encourage use of bigger, stronger actions or roles in mime, movement or dance.
- Give the child jobs and responsibilities.
- Encourage the child to run errands, with another child at first.
- Use puppets in play or drama.
- Participation in noisy group activities – singing, chanting, vocalising as animals.
- Do things with, rather than for the child, ensuring that the child is the one to complete the task.
- Build relationships with peers and adults, for example by keeping the other children included in small group activities consistent.
- Use a gesture to accompany responses for all children in the class, the child then has a means of contributing to activities other than using spoken language. Encouraging all children to use the gesture as well give a verbal response ensures the child is not singled out.

