

Selective Mutism Interest Group

“The main thing about Selective Mutism (SM) is that I can’t talk comfortably with people in every situation. If I’m at home with my parents and close family, I’m fine, and you wouldn’t think I had any problem.

But if we go out and other people are around – or people I don’t know well come to my home – I get anxious and the words can’t come out. It’s worst when I am at school, because it’s full of people I don’t know well”

*Can I tell you about Selective Mutism?
Maggie Johnson & Alison Wintgens (2012) Jessica Kingsley Publishers*

Selective Mutism is a consistent failure to speak in specific situations despite being able to speak in other, more familiar situations providing ...

- there has been a duration at least one month beyond first month at school or nursery
- it is not due to lack of knowledge of, or comfort with, the language
- it cannot be better explained by a communication disorder or any other abnormality

Children with this disorder:

- sometimes use non-spoken or non-verbal means to communicate and may be willing or eager to perform/engage in social encounters when speech is not required
- do not initiate or reciprocally respond when spoken to by others (but they may respond minimally)

Ref: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Ed 5, May 2013, p 195)

Selective Mutism is characterised by fear and avoidance of talking to, in front of, certain people. Children and adults with Selective Mutism do not choose to be silent in the situations in which they cannot speak. They genuinely **cannot speak** because they are too anxious to speak. Almost all children and adults with Selective Mutism would love to be able to speak in every situation, but they cannot.

Children may appear shy, sullen, withdrawn at these times, but this is not a true reflection of character. A desperation to avoid talking may lead to oppositional behaviour. **Removing the expectation to speak reduces anxiety and oppositional behaviour.** It often begins during the transition from home to pre-school/ school and affects approximately 1 in 150 children.

How we can help in school:

- We need to understand the condition.
- We need to reassure child/ young person: ‘I understand that it can be difficult to talk in some situations and that a worried feeling can make this happen so there is no expectation to speak until you are ready.’
- Make accommodations - check your classroom, routines and expectations – when do you expect verbal communication, how can you alleviate anxiety here?
- Key staff can support a plan with the child/young person and family.
- Social skills, confidence building, assertiveness training as appropriate to the individual.
- Support with attendance, coming in to school.

Ref: The Selective Mutism Resource Manual by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens

Every case is unique and requires a partnership approach.

Further information and advice can be found at:

www.smira.org.uk
www.ispeak.org.uk
Mutism

Selective Mutism Information and Research Association
A support group and services for young people and adults with Selective

Maggie Johnson & Alison Wintgens

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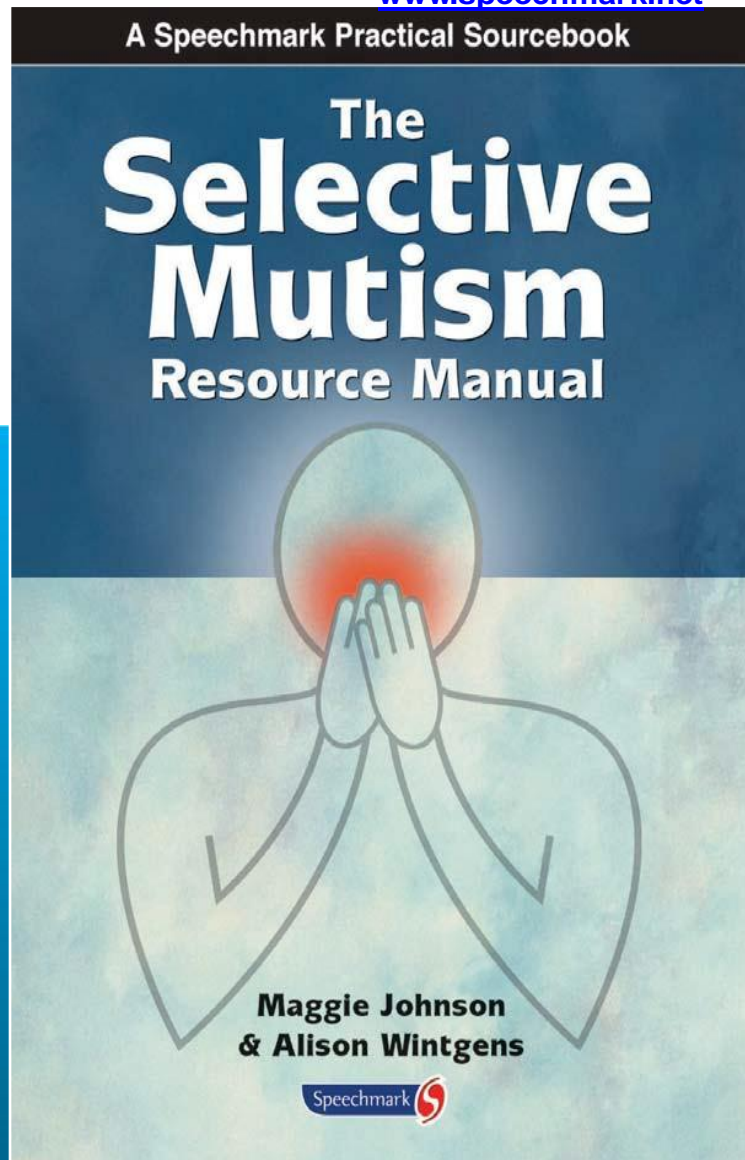
Selectively mute children are at a significant disadvantage personally, socially and educationally. With more emphasis on verbalisation within the school curriculum, Selective Mutism is also a greater barrier to learning. Yet resources and attention are often directed towards the disruptive child and there is a lack of material to help those who keep quiet. This unique manual emphasises practical assessment and treatment and provides advice and information, filling a significant gap in the availability of suitable resources in this field.

The Selective Mutism Resource Manual:

- Is based on behavioural principles and a hierarchy of stages of confident speaking originally conceived by Anthony Glassberg.
- Starts with a summary of the literature and theory, followed by detailed ideas on assessment and management, with accompanying material that can be photocopied.
- Includes case examples and a discussion about progress, transfer and discharge.
- Is written to help teachers, clinical and educational psychologists, speech and language therapists, child psychiatrists and parents.

Maggie Johnson is a speech & language therapist specialising in childhood communication disorders. Her experience in education and community settings spans thirty years in special schools, language units, mainstream schools, clinics and multi-agency centres. Maggie works for Kent Community Health NHS and lectures across the UK and abroad.

Alison Wintgens worked as a speech and language therapist at St George's Hospital in London for over 30 years. Until her retirement in 2011 she was a consultant speech and language therapist in the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. She has extensive experience of working with children and adolescents with a range of communication disorders and additional emotional or behavioural problems. She now teaches, writes, assesses and advises on selective mutism.



This excellent book provides a much needed practical manual... I fully recommend this resource manual. This book should be a must in every agency that happens to meet children with SM and their families.

European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry