

Advice for Reluctant Talkers

A reluctant talker is a child who is able to talk freely in some situations but is silent in others. In these situations the child may use non-verbal communication but doesn't use verbal communication.



Supporting Reluctant Talkers in school or nursery:

- ✓ Encourage a “have a go” attitude in your class or setting, where mistakes are not penalised.
- ✓ Consider admitting to your own mistakes sometimes to let children know that it is ok to make them.
- ✓ Give the child extra time to make a response after a question or in a conversation.
- ✓ Allow for lots of different ways for children to join in class activities and give responses, for example:
 - *showing a picture or whiteboard in response.*
 - *acting out a response.*
 - *allow children to select from a set of alternative responses (these could be verbal responses, written words, objects or pictures).*
 - *allow paired listening and responding.*
- ✓ Respond and reward all attempts at communications, such as smiling, nodding and eye contact.
- ✓ Praise any attempt to initiate an interaction with you or another adult, even if they don't use any words.
- ✓ Encourage and support the child to build a relationship with a key member of staff.
- ✓ When the child does use voice, it is important to react as though this is normal and natural.
- ✓ The child might find it easier when they are in small groups. If they have a best friend, they will feel more relaxed when their friend is in the group, too.
- ✗ Try to avoid putting children “on the spot” unless you are confident the child is able to handle it.

Further information:

SMIRA (Selective Mutism Information and Research Association) website:

<http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/>. Handouts from SMIRA: <http://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/What-is-SM-Primary-School.pdf>