



## Talking to Friends and Family about Selective Mutism

Dear family and friends,

Thank you so much for being a part of my child's life. As you know my child often finds it difficult to talk in many social situations. We know now that my child has something called selective mutism. Selective mutism is an anxiety disorder where a child does not speak in some social situations and due to intense fear and anxiety. Here is some ways you can help.

- Please understand my child isn't being intentionally rude or oppositional when he/she doesn't answer your questions or say hello, goodbye, or thank you. These things are very hard for my child.
- Try to connect with my child **without asking questions**, particularly at the beginning of visit so that he/she can warm up to the situation. Instead, play with my child in an activity that they choose. **Comment and describe** on the things you see them doing. Provide my child with lots of really specific praise for behaviours you like (e.g., "I love the way you are working so hard on that picture").
- If my child seems really comfortable, you can try to ask some **forced-choice or open-ended questions**. For example, you can ask him or her if they would like "chocolate or vanilla ice cream?" or "what would they like to drink." Make sure to **wait a full five seconds** without saying anything after asking a question. This might feel really weird but my child needs that time to answer. Try really hard to *not* ask **yes/no questions**, because my child might nod instead of telling you the answer and we are working hard on verbal responding.
- When my child answers your question, please **repeat** what he/she said so he/she can have more practice being heard. Follow that up with some **specific praise** about his/her response, for example "Thank you so much for telling me that you like chocolate ice cream."
- I might ask you to come with us while we play one of our favourite games in a quiet place. Watch for my cue and you can slowly join in on the play as my child becomes more comfortable in the situation.

If you would like to learn more about selective mutism, please visit the Anxiety BC webpage ([www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)). Thanks!