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## DOs & DON'Ts for Interacting with Those with Selective Mutism



**When interacting with a child with Selective Mutism, DO:**

- Allow for warm-up time.
- Monitor the child's body language.
- Talk "around" the child at first with focus on parents or siblings.
- Get down on the child's level and focus on a prop.

**When interacting with a child with Selective Mutism, DO NOT:**

- Try to be "the one who gets this child to speak." These efforts did not work in the past, are not working now, and will never work in the future!
- Disregard warm-up time.
- Approach the child without

- ⦿ Ask choice and direct questions to the child with focus on the prop.
- ⦿ Allow for hesitation.
- ⦿ Re-ask questions if needed.
- ⦿ Accept nonverbal communication (e.g., pointing, nodding, gesturing) without an expectation for speech.
- ⦿ Accept the child's level of communication as the first step to securing comfort.
- ⦿ Understand that strategies can be used to help the child progress into speech, and that developing the child's comfort, engagement, and nonverbal communication is a vital step in the process.
- ⦿ preparation.
- ⦿ Look directly at the child without focusing on a prop.
- ⦿ Ask open-ended questions, which require the child to think in order to formulate an answer.
- ⦿ Ask, bribe, or beg the child to talk to you.
- ⦿ Appear upset if the child does not respond to you.

### **Suggested Games and Activities to Complete with Relatives & Friends!**

- ⦿ Show off school work, drawings, photo albums, etc. where the relative can ask direct/choice questions regarding the 'prop' shown
- ⦿ Play board games
- ⦿ Card games (Go Fish, War)
- ⦿ Complete back/forth interview games
- ⦿ Jokes & Riddles
- ⦿ Treasure Hunts
- ⦿ Puppets
- ⦿ Eye Spy
- ⦿ Cooking
- ⦿ Art Projects
- ⦿ Helping around the house

During these games and activities, relatives, friends, or school staff should ask the child questions. It is *how* these questions are asked that will make the difference. For example,

if the individual is typically mute with someone, but becoming nonverbal, using a parent, sibling, or someone else he or she is verbal with as a Verbal Intermediary® is suggested. As the individual responds by telling his or her Verbal Intermediary®, the relative should repeat what was said. The repetition of what the individual said, if done in a very subtle way, helps him or her know that they were heard and it was not a “big deal.” Therefore, when repeating, eye contact should be minimized and a very nonchalant, no-big-deal attitude should be adopted.

To effectively overcome Selective Mutism and all anxieties, an individual needs to be involved in a treatment program, such as [CommuniCamp™](#) Intensive Group Treatment and [Individual Intensive Treatment](#) which employ the evidenced-based [Social Communication Anxiety Treatment® \(S-CAT®\)](#). Developed by [Dr. Elisa Shipon-Blum](#), this holistic or “whole-person” treatment approach is designed to reduce anxiety, build self-esteem, increase social comfort and communication in all settings.

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By [Alex Talarico](#) | June 7th, 2018 | Categories: [Smart Tips and Strategies](#) | Comments Off

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