




# Selective Mutism

## Dos and Don'ts




Selective Mutism is a severe anxiety disorder, where a person is unable to speak in certain social situations. The person does not choose whether or not to speak; they are literally unable to speak. A person with selective mutism will freeze and feel panicked when there is an expectation for them to talk.

### To support a person with selective mutism:

#### Do

-  Remember that it is not a choice for the person, they are genuinely afraid to speak. Have patience and allow them to speak if/when they are ready.
-  Make comments rather than asking direct questions to the person. This takes the pressure off them, as you are not expecting an answer. For example, you could say "I like this song. I can't remember if you do" rather than asking "do you like this song?"
-  Accept non-verbal means of communication. For example, nodding or shaking of the head for 'yes' and 'no'.

#### Don't

-  Don't put pressure on the person to speak out loud when they are not comfortable to do this. This will increase their anxiety.
-  Don't talk about your own anxieties about the person's selective mutism in front of them.
-  If the person with selective mutism does speak, don't make a big fuss about this. A big reaction may overwhelm a self-conscious person.