

# Situational Mutism Fact Sheet

## What is situational mutism?

Also known as selective mutism, situational mutism results in people feeling unable to speak in some situations. The reason for this inability to speak may be anxiety, previous trauma or bad experiences, or a combination of both factors. People who are situationally mute can often speak in situations where they feel relaxed and comfortable and lose the ability to speak when they are overwhelmed or anxious. Some people who are situationally mute always struggle to speak in certain situations such as at school, whilst other people may vary depending on more specific situational factors.

Some autistic people may experience situational mutism when they experience sensory overload. You might notice these warning signs that they are struggling:

- They begin to stumble over their words or slur their words more than is typical
- The speed of their speech slows down noticeably and often without them realising
- Their responses have become shorter and less coherent
- Their responses seem more 'scripted' (like things they have learned or copied from elsewhere) than is typical of them

## How to support someone who is situationally mute:

- Provide a safe space for sensory regulation
- Offer a break from conversation, or the opportunity to resume the conversation at another day
- Build the trust of the individual, and listen to however they are communicating with you
- Offer alternative forms of communication such as pen and paper or communication aids
- Work with the individual and their parents and carers if appropriate to identify and mitigate causes of anxiety

The Here to Help 'resources', which include but are not limited to, website, information sheets, and in person workshops are intended to provide general information only. The 'resources' provided by 'Here to Help' do not replace, or supersede, professional and/or medical advice. Users should take professional advice before taking action which contradicts previous medical guidance. So far as permissible by law, SJOG does not accept any liability related to individual's use or interpretation of the 'resources' provided.

Whilst we have selected some resources from other organisations which we believe will be helpful, we accept no liability for the content of these resources.'

Although SJOG have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that the 'resources' provided are accurate, neither SJOG or any of its employees, can be held responsible for the direct or indirect actions taken by users following engagement with Here to Help 'resources'.

### Sources and further reading:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/rightcare/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/2022/10/More-than-words-supporting-effective-communication-with-autistic-people-in-health-care-settings-3.pdf>

<https://www.selectivemutism.org.uk/about-selective-mutism/>

The Here to Help 'resources', which include but are not limited to, website, information sheets, and in person workshops are intended to provide general information only. The 'resources' provided by 'Here to Help' do not replace, or supersede, professional and/or medical advice. Users should take professional advice before taking action which contradicts previous medical guidance. So far as permissible by law, SJOG does not accept any liability related to individual's use or interpretation of the 'resources' provided.

Whilst we have selected some resources from other organisations which we believe will be helpful, we accept no liability for the content of these resources.'

Although SJOG have taken all reasonable precautions to ensure that the 'resources' provided are accurate, neither SJOG or any of its employees, can be held responsible for the direct or indirect actions taken by users following engagement with Here to Help 'resources'.