

The Diagnostic and Statistical
Manual of Mental Disorders
(5th ed.; DSM-5; American
Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Selective mutism (SM) is a
childhood anxiety disorder in
which a child is unable to speak
in socially expected situations
(i.e., at school) despite having
the ability to speak in other
situations (i.e., at home).

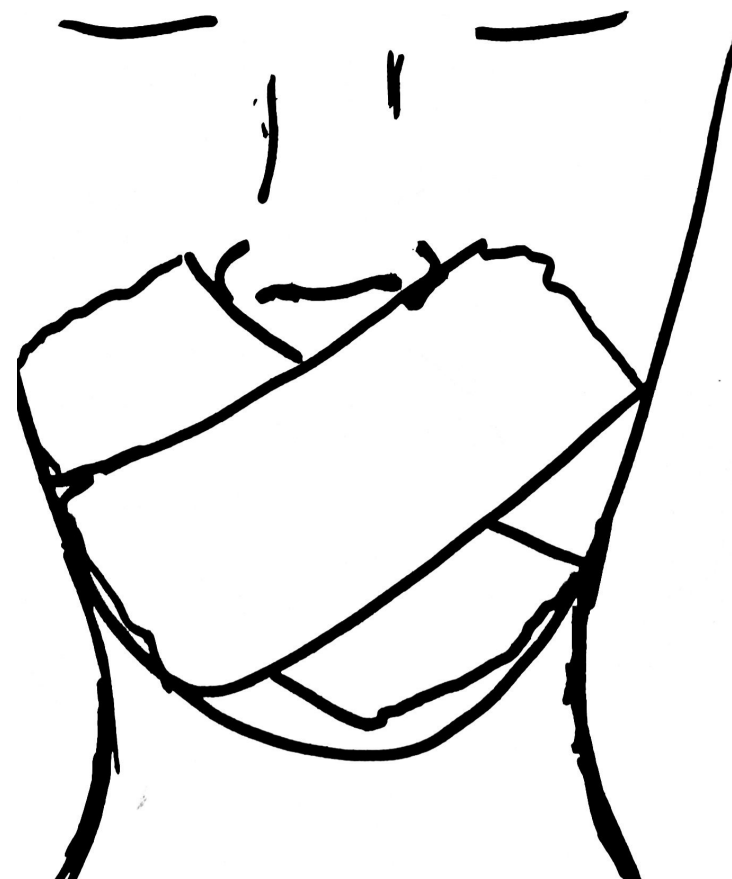
Common Symptoms:

- ♦ Lack of eye contact
- ♦ Clinging to parents
- ♦ Hiding
- ♦ Running away
- ♦ Crying
- ♦ Freezing
- ♦ Tantruming if asked to speak publicly
- ♦ Avoidance of eating in public
- ♦ Anxious when having picture or video taken
- ♦ Anxious to use public restrooms

Websites to check out:

<https://selectivemutismcenter.org/>
<https://www.selectivemutism.org/>
<https://www.asha.org/>
<https://wordsinmytoes.com/>

October is **Selective Mutism** Awareness Month



My Story: Living With Selective Mutism

Growing up, I was the loud “bossy” sibling. But if you saw me anywhere outside of my small comfort zone, which pretty much just resided within my home, I did my best to shrink, not be noticed, not be heard.

I didn’t understand why I couldn’t speak at school. The words just got stuck. They got stuck in my toes and wouldn’t come up. Initially, my teachers didn’t know what to do with me. There was even a time in the first grade I was sent to the principal’s office for “refusing to speak.” I was defiant — a problem child.

Thankfully, during an event for free dental checkups, a lady sitting next to me in line tried to talk to me because I was so terrified I was in tears and hyperventilating. After a while talking with me, she realized that even though I was engaging with her, I wasn’t talking or making consistent eye contact, even when the checkups were over.

When I went back to my mom, she came with me and asked if she could spend a little time with me while we waited on my sister to be done. I honestly don’t remember a lot about what happened next, but I do know I started getting help after meeting her.

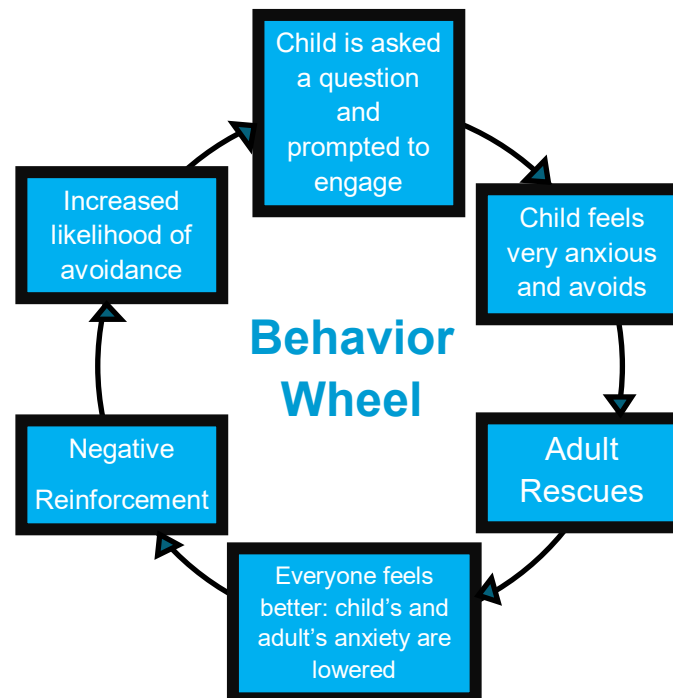
Today, I still struggle with speaking, but I’ve come a long way. I’ve held jobs and even leadership positions. It’s hard, but with the tools counseling has given me, I am able to find ways to work around and with my struggles. I’m getting better all the time. I don’t know if there will ever be a day when I no longer will have to deal with this intense anxiety, but it’s getting more manageable.

-Sammi Gibson



Common Misconceptions

- ◆ The person is choosing not to speak
- ◆ They are oppositional or manipulative
- ◆ SM is caused by trauma or abuse
- ◆ They have speech problems
- ◆ SM is a form of autism
- ◆ SM is only a childhood disorder
- ◆ They are just really shy and will grow out of it



Affects <1% of the population
Between 1-7 out 1000 people

The Truth of Selective Mutism

- ◆ The person’s anxiety is so high they become incapable of speaking in certain situations and around certain people
- ◆ Sometimes there’s a physical response, where their throats tightens up
- ◆ Regardless, the words are stuck
- ◆ They start avoiding speaking situations in order to avoid the anxiety
- ◆ Though someone with SM may be more vulnerable, SM is not caused by traumatic events
- ◆ They are able to speak perfectly fine in certain situations and around certain people such as in their home and around family
- ◆ They may even be the most talkative person in those situations
- ◆ SM is fundamentally different from autism, though someone can have both
- ◆ SM does not just go away on its own. A child will not just “grow out of it.” SM can persist into adulthood