



Supporting Children with Selective Mutism in Early Years Settings: 'Sliding-in' Approach

Research suggests that it is most helpful if children with Situational Mutism are supported in those settings where the child is anxious about speaking. It highlights the importance of working collaboratively with the child's key adults in that setting.

The '**Sliding-in**' technique is an intervention for supporting children who experience anxiety in relation to speaking in front of others. It is a step-by-step process which aims to reduce the child's anxiety about speaking and gradually encourages the child to speak to others, one person at a time.

Before getting started:

- ✓ Ensure that parents and all staff working with the child are aware of and using the general advice regarding Selective Mutism provided, before starting the 'sliding-in' approach. This includes 'The pep talk' e.g. each adult working with the child must have already acknowledged the difficulty with talking and taken the pressure off – 'I know you find talking in front of others hard, don't worry I won't ever put you on the spot'
- ✓ Parents and setting to discuss who in the child's environment they are most comfortable with / already talking to – this could be a key person, auxiliary staff or another child. If the child does not feel comfortable speaking to anyone in the setting, this might be a parent/relative.
- ✓ The '**Key Person**' chosen to establish and generalise the child's talking at the setting, spends 3 x 10mins with the child each week to support progress.
- ✓ Choose a quiet space where the child won't be overheard and the session is highly unlikely to be interrupted and progress as outlined below.
- ✓ As appropriate for the child's age, tell them what you will be doing in the sessions (e.g. 'We're going to have a play together in the room' or 'we can help you talk to other people, one person at time). Make sure you reiterate that the child is not expected to talk during the sessions e.g. '*you can talk as much or as little as you feel like*'
- ✓ Depending on how comfortable the child is with playing with/talking to the **Key Person**, the **Key Person** now begins the potentially very slow process of establishing a relationship with the child where they are comfortable to speak to them using single words/sentences/low cognitive demand answers/ spontaneous speech. Once this is established, at the child's own pace, a new talking partner is gently 'slid in' e.g. through starting the slow process described below.

Example of ‘Sliding-in’ approach with parent as ‘familiar’ person and child’s chosen key person ‘sliding in’.

Review progress every 3-4 weeks to check the child is making small amounts of progress.

3x sessions/week (10 mins each)	Goal
Step 1	Child and parent in a quiet space near the ‘classroom’ engaged in motivating activity needing minimal verbal response e.g. counting blocks when building a tower. No other people are present/nearby.
Step 2	Child and parent in quiet space knowing that key person is a short distance away, e.g. in the room next door, in the classroom.
Step 3	Child and parent in quiet space with key person even nearer e.g. outside the closed door.
Step 4	Child and parent engaged in preferred activity with key person outside the open door.
Step 5	Child and parent engaged in preferred activity with key person entering the room for a short time e.g. to pick something up from the room.
Step 6	Child and parent continue their activity while key person comes in and carries out an activity at a distance from the child for a few minutes while the child and parent continue their activity.
Step 7	Child and parent continue their activity with key person carrying out their own activity next to the child/at the same table.
Step 8	Child, parent and key person will all take turns at preferred game requiring limited verbal response e.g. counting (child can decide how much each person should count).
Step 9	Child, parent and key person move on to slightly longer utterances which should be agreed beforehand e.g. My name is... I like to eat... (The adults can start so child has a model. Again child can decide what information is going to be given.)
Step 10	<p>Once the child is comfortable speaking with the key person then parent no longer needs to be present and the key person with the child can carry on with activities and introduce one new person at a time to the session (the child can have some say who joins in next, e.g. a favourite friend).</p> <p>In discussion with Key Person/ Parents/ Child (if appropriate for age), decide who to slide in and with which activity/game based on what has worked above and who the child might respond to best.</p> <p>With each new person ‘sliding in’ the process starts at Step 1 again and moves at the child’s pace.</p>

N.B. Some children may not need every step and may be able to move from step 1 to step 4, the important thing is that the child is involved in setting the targets and these aren’t changed. Three 10 minute sessions should be allocated per week, rather than one longer session.

N.B. Activities can be changed to make more verbal demands on the child, e.g. from rote counting/days of the week to completing sentences with 1 word to games involving a sentence, e.g. “I went to the shop...”

Reference: ‘**The Selective Mutism Resource Manual**’ by Maggie Johnson and Alison Wintgens