

Selective Mutism During School Closures

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Children with Selective Mutism may be thrilled about the current school closures, but we want to be sure they keep up their brave skills and that they are able to return to school as confident as possible. Below are some suggestions depending on your level of comfort being around other people. If you need other suggestions, or need assistance with brave charts, rewards, phrasing, practicing or anything else, please feel free to reach out!

If you will go out publicly...

This is a great time to do several exposure activities each day! Think about all the things you don't have time for while your child is at school and create some goals for each day. These might include:

- Asking for a book at a bookstore, a toy at a toy store, etc.
- Ordering food
- Asking how much something costs
- Going on a "scavenger hunt" asking people their favorite color, favorite kind of animal, etc.
- Go to a park and practice asking people if you can pet their dog

If you will have people at your house...

- Facilitate play-dates with specific speaking goals in mind (that are practiced in advance)
- Try out new babysitters (i.e. friends' teenagers who are also out of school) to facilitate talking with a new person
- Invite over one adult friend or relative at a time and work on fading in

If you will self-quarantine...

- Have your child write a letter (or dictate a letter) to a friend or relative. Then practice saying "Here you go" or "I wrote to my aunt". Meet the mail carrier at your mailbox and practice brave talking.
- Practice saying, "I can take that" or "Are there any more boxes?" and use brave talking with the UPS/Fed-Ex delivery person.
- Go on a scavenger hunt to neighbors' homes and (keeping your distance) and ask them their favorite color, animal, candy bar, etc.
- Bake cookies for neighbors who may also be quarantined or elderly and practice saying, "These are for you" or "I made these for you".

- Ask friends and relatives to send videos to your child asking them certain questions. Have your child send videos back. After several times, see if your child is ready for Facetime (a “live” conversation).
- Practice games that require speaking so that when it’s time to re-join people they have lots of practice under their belts. Good options for younger kids: Zingo, Spot It, Headbandz and Go Fish. For older kids: Battleship, Mad Libs, Would You Rather, Headbandz. For all kids: Any games your child enjoys that you can build in verbalizations! (Tip: some of these can be played on Facetime!)
- Discourage non-verbal responses even if your child speaks “normally” at home. If they nod their head in response to your question, ask them, “Yes, you would like some, or you don’t want any right now?” We don’t want to create new habits or reinforce old habits during this time of quarantine.

Need support to implement any of these strategies? I am happy to schedule “teletherapy” sessions with you, or directly with your child if he/she is 10 or older. Younger children are welcome to send me videos to practice their brave talking and I will send them videos in return!