

Supporting A Child Who Is A Reluctant Speaker



If a child is a reluctant speaker they often have developing or appropriate expressive language skills but can be reluctant to use these in specific situations

Some children will use more language at home and be reluctant at pre-school / school or in different environments like their house compared to a relative's house.

Children who are reluctant to talk will need lots of help and support to feel confident and happy to communicate with other children and adults.

For some children, they are reluctant to speak because they are worried about talking. It is important to remember that your child wants to talk, but their anxiety stops them.

How to support your child

Make comments during play about what is happening.

Gently praise the child when they do communicate, for example by saying "good talking" or by showing interest in what they are saying.

Respond to all communication that they use, including verbal and non-verbal. Do not insist they say it if they has already communicated it non-verbally.

Also praise him for communicating non-verbally, for example if he uses an action or a point.

Reduce the pressure on them by not asking them direct questions or giving them unnecessary directions.

If you do need to ask them a question, try to use a closed question so they can answer 'yes' or 'no'. If they then choose to give you more information then this is their choice and there is no pressure on them. For example instead of "**what did you do at pre-school today?**" you could say "**did you play outside at pre-school today?**".

Your child may be fearful of speaking and it is not a choice not to speak. Therefore emphasis needs to be on reducing speech pressures in situations where they are reluctant to speak. This can be done by having an alternative means of communication. This could be **pictures which they can point to**, for example:- make a choice of a song during singing time or thumbs up when taking the register.

It is best if the whole group also adopts the same approach so that your child is not singled out. For example all children could select a picture to choose a song. If materials are needed for this please contact the therapist.

If it is felt to be due to fear the child should be reassured that you know he is not happy to speak at certain times just yet and that this is ok. It is important to talk as if they will do one day so emphasise the '**just yet**'. This may be best coming from a parent / carer in conjunction with pre-school / school staff.

Supporting A Child Who Is A Reluctant Speaker In The Classroom



Create a friendly
an relaxed
atmosphere for
the child

Avoid too much eye contact.

Direct eye contact can be intense and make a child feel under pressure and anxious. It might be easier for the child to work in pairs or a small group, instead of in a whole class

Think about how you can **adapt tasks and activities to involve the child without them having to talk out loud** e.g. let them –

- Turn the pages of a book at story time
- Collect or give out the food/drink at snack time
- Collect or give out equipment to the other children
- Take the class register to the office

Try to **identify one key staff member** in school who the child can work with to build a relationship and feel confident.

Give the child lots of encouragement and praise to interact with other children

Encourage home-school connections to bridge the gap between settings e.g. use a home-school diary between parents and school staff. Consider sending the child's class work home e.g. art/craft work, or vice-versa. Allow the child to bring in show and tell objects to school.

Try to **avoid asking the child direct questions.** This can be hard, but remember how scary answering a question can be! Remember that it is ok for the child to answer you without talking e.g. by a nod/shake of the head or by pointing

Reduce the amount of questions you ask, and instead comment on what the child is doing when they are playing. This reduces the pressure and anxiety the child may feel when you ask them a question. It will encourage them to start to communicate with you on their own terms, when they are ready.

If you do have to ask a question e.g. to ask a choice, start by telling the child to 'point' to the one they choose instead of having to 'say'. E.g. **you say "Point to the one you'd like" or "Show me the one you'd like"**. You don't want to stop the child from making choices, so do it in a way that makes them feel at ease.

If you have to ask the child a question, **give them lots of time to respond.** Children need more time to think about what you have said before they can create an answer. By giving the child time to answer you, you are reducing the pressure on the rushing an answer.