

SELECTIVE MUTISM: What is the *Shaping Technique*?

Shaping is a useful technique if you are key worker, working with a child with Selective Mutism, supporting the child at school and a conversational partner is not available, or is not suitable.



All interventions must begin with a period of building a rapport with the child, without any expectations of the child to speak. They can play games such as: drawing, building, hangman. The adult is engaging and creating a rapport.

This period above might carry on for quite some time, please do not rush this, as it is an important step as the child needs to feel safe and comfortable.

Once the child is completely comfortable within the key worker presence, the key worker will encourage the child to start making noises and then very gradually increases the verbal load required until the child is saying words.

It is important to know that when the child is starting to make a noise the key worker MUST ACT completely normally and not make a deal of the fact that the child is making a noise, as the child has always spoken.

- We do not actually ask the child to make a noise directly.
- By repeating a noise several times slowly and calmly, the child start actually copying. Noises where the child does not need to move the mouth are less scary (like S or F) than those where they need to move the mouth (P or CH).
- Key worker needs to make a hierarchy of sounds
- Never move down to the hierarchy until the child is feeling totally comfortable with the previous sound.
- Once the child is comfortable, encourage to merge the sounds:
 - Make the sound CCCCC and then the child repeats CCCC, then say AT, and repeat several times C AT C AT.....

This it is a very gradual process where the child is taking little steps.

When doing shaping you need to be creative, by thinking of what the child's interests are and then do activities.

ACTIVITIES:

- If the child likes playing with cars and tractors, whilst playing with a garage, you can make all sorts of noises.
- Make up a language, like the robot language:
 - How are you: TTTTTTTTTT
 - I am fine: SSSSSSSSS

- Copy-cat game: the child is copying your movements first, then single sounds and so on.
- Simon says: This game can be done in a group. The child has to perform the commands given, in this case the key worker has a noise for each action. For example:
 - Simon says: “*the elephant are coming*” make the noise BBBBBBBB
 - Simon says “*the monkeys are jumping*” make the noise eeeeeeeeeee
 - Simon says *lion*, make the sound ROAR etc
- Reading a story to a child, and then stop at a word like SHEEP and unblend the sounds : Sh eep Sh eep SH eep until the child is spontaneously saying it too.

REMEMBER:

- **Be very creative**
- **Make it enjoyable**
- **Make it fun**
- **Do not add any pressure**