SELECTIVE MUTISM
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Selective mutism is a term used to describe a person who can speak, but doesn't speak.

Mary was a well-developed eight year old girl who babbled away and did well at school. She was a popular little girl who often had friends to play as she was an only child.

One night Mary and her parents were held at gunpoint while their house was being burgled. Thankfully they were not hurt on the outside, but the trauma turned this little girl into a 'selective mute'. She would still talk to mom and dad at home, even though very softly, so she could and did talk. Yet, outside of her home, and even when friends and family came to visit, Mary would not say a word.

Mary's parents sought help from the Mind Moves® Institute and together Mary and I found a way for her to speak again

POSSIBLE FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SELECTIVE MUTISM

Selective mutism occurs most often after some form of trauma. Trauma doesn't have to be something as hectic as Mary had experienced, it can also be the result of a big fright; having been in hospital; the arrival of a new baby in the family; a scary movie; an intense allergic reaction; a near drowning, etc. Selective mutism is most often the body's way of telling us that a person is experiencing intense anxiety.

Selective mutism is also associated with an aberrant Moro reflex. A Moro reflex is a primitive reflex that triggers the fight, flight or freeze response. In a foetus and young baby the Moro reflex acts as a survival reflex that jolts the entire nervous system into action. Around six months after birth, the Moro reflex should go to rest when the higher brain centers are more able to determine if something is life threatening or not. Once a Moro reflex has gone to rest, it can become active again due to illness, trauma, injury or any other incident that the brain codes as life threatening.
When the Moro reflex is triggered, the Vagus nerve redirects energy away from the speech organs and metabolic system in support of the vital organs - heart and lungs. Heart beat and breathing rate increase, the pupils dilate and the calf muscles contract in readiness for action, while the eyes, ears and nose scan the environment to determine where the threat is coming from.

The effect of the Vagus nerve is known to most people as a dry mouth and butterflies in the tummy. This same response is responsible for children who often complaint about a sore tummy before school or who experience selective mutism.

THE ROLE OF BREATHING

For some children who present with selective mutism, breath-holding becomes second nature. Instead of breathing fast and shallow when they get a fright, there is a sharp intake of breath and then their breathing ‘gets stuck’ – they do not breathe out. Because rhythmic breathing is needed for speech, breath-holding and fast, swallow breathing impacts negatively on speech.

LANGUAGE

Language and speech are found in the higher brain areas, while the survival response is part of the lower brain area. When a child feels unsafe or threatened, the survival brain takes over, which means action become more important and speech becomes less important.

Sometimes it is very difficult to pinpoint the cause or origin, but even without pinpointing it, there are a few things a parent or therapist can do to help a child to relax, feel safe and regain full access to their speech centers.

WHAT CAN YOU DO

The Mind Moves Power on stimulates the Vagus nerve to direct energy to the speech organs (and to metabolism), while slowing down the breathing rate and heart rate. A sip of water would be a great idea at this point to sooth the dry mouth and throat.

Every move should be done while breathing slowly and deeply. If breathing deeply is difficult, practice breathing by blowing out candles. Systematically increase the distance between child and candle so the child is challenged to take a deep breath, but experiences success. Blowing up balloons and blowing bubbles are helpful too.
The Mind Moves **Leg workout** lengthens the calf muscles to relax the Tendon Guard reflex (tight calve muscles), while the **Lip workout** activates the speech organs.

### Leg workout
Sit on a chair and straighten both legs forward, while resting the heels of the feet on the floor. Raise both legs off the floor. Flex and point feet and notice any tightness in the calf muscles. Rest the left leg on the floor and flex the right foot hold it for a count of eight in the flexed position. Relax the foot. Repeat the move at least three times. Rest the right leg on the floor and flex the left foot, hold it for a count of eight in the flexed positions. Relax the foot. Repeat the move at least three times.

Raise both legs off the floor. Flex and point both feet and notice any difference in the tightness of the calf muscles.

This move as well as climbing up a ladder, horse riding or walking on the heels lengthen the calf and hamstring muscles, reduce hyperactivity and improve impulse control.

### Lip workout
Say “cooee”, pull the lips into a wide smile while stretching the “eeeee" sound for the count of eight.

This move improves muscle tone in and around the lips for clear pronunciation.

The Mind Moves **Massage** and the **Rise and Shine** create a sense of internal safety and security and the ability to face the world with courage, while the ‘planting’ of the feet grounds the child which activates the higher centers of the brain.

### Mind Moves massage
Child must stand upright and hold both arms 90° to the side of the body. Stand behind the child and firmly trace the outline of the body from head to toe. Hold the feet for a moment before repeating 3 times.

This move develops tactile awareness, gravitational security and a positive sense of self.
Amazing results have been found when these five Mind Moves are done daily for a period of six weeks, and twice a day. Every move should be repeated three times before the next move is done.

Mind Moves do not replace any other therapy, but have been found supportive of other therapies to ease a child out of elective mutism.

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