

# Do you have a child who goes silent?

It may be the invisible diagnosis of selective mutism.

## What is selective mutism (SM)?

SM is an anxiety diagnosis that affects 1 in 100 children and involves an inability to speak in certain situations. The child usually has a fully functional language at home with the family but may not be able to speak at school or in other social situations. The child wants nothing more than to talk but is unable to do so due to spiking anxiety.

The child may have only SM, or SM in combination with another diagnosis.

"You can liken the problem with trying to jump from the highest trampoline. There's nothing the child would rather do, but it's not possible because they're too scared."

Speech therapist Carina Engström

## How does the diagnosis affect the child?

Not being able to speak can lead to misunderstandings, exclusion, and even danger. Some children with SM become dejected or depressed. It is not uncommon to have difficulty sleeping, separation anxiety, and other phobic symptoms. Often the diagnosis leads to difficulties in school. Most pupils with SM are unable to ask for help, or to signal when they get hurt, or need to go to the toilet. Others may fall victim to peer pressure or bullying.

Without treatment, these children can fall behind in their social development with peers and risk facing a long exclusion.

## How is SM treated?

Examples of methods are child and family therapy or behavioural therapy where the child gradually gets to practice talking to peers, school staff, and other people in the child's life. In the case of slightly older children, anti-anxiety medication in the SSRI group may have an effect. However, medicine should always be prescribed in combination with other treatment.

For school-age children, it is important that there is a close cooperation between parents, teachers, and a psychologist and/or speech therapist, or other therapist with knowledge of SM. Treatment is usually more effective the younger the child is, so early intervention is important. There is also a lot you can do as a parent at home with the child, but you need support and guidelines. Parents should also be offered counselling.

"I want to be able to talk like everyone else mom, but nothing comes out."

Boy, 8 years old

*Engelska*

### **Where to seek help?**

A national care plan for the diagnosis has yet to be developed and the approach is therefore different in different parts of the country. But guardians should usually contact BVC, BUP, or a speech therapy clinic.

Sometimes there is a lack of knowledge about SM, both at school and in health care. Remember that you can then utilise the freedom of choice reform and seek help in another region.

Good luck!

This flyer has been created and published by the project *Tala om tystnad* (Speak about Silence), supported by the Swedish Inheritance Fund.

We are working to make the diagnosis of selective mutism visible nationally in collaboration with health care and schools.

Feel free to listen to the *Tala om tystnad* podcast on Acast, and find other material at [talaomtystnad.se](http://talaomtystnad.se)

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