



Building Brave Muscles:
The Specific Behavioral
Skills that Target
Increasing Bravery
Laura Kirmayer, PhD, MSW
Director of Brave Buddies

Child Mind Institute

Founded in 2009

The **only independent nonprofit** organization exclusively dedicated to transforming mental health care for children everywhere.

To help children reach their full potential we must:

- Develop more effective treatments for childhood psychiatric and learning disorders.
- Empower children, families and teachers with the scientifically sound information they need.
- Build the science of healthy brain development.

The Child Mind Institute does not accept funding from the pharmaceutical industry.



“The Child Mind Institute dares to imagine a world where no child suffers from mental illness.”

-Brooke Garber Neidich, Chair, Child Mind Institute

Upcoming Events

For more information,
please visit [childmind.org/en/
events](http://childmind.org/en/events)



Windward
Teacher
Training
Institute

Windward Teacher Training Institute at the Child Mind Institute: Expository Writing Instruction: Part One (Hochman Method)

Instructed by Betsy M. Duffy, M.S.Ed., Director of Language Arts at The Windward School & Dr. Hochman

Tuesday, January 12, 2016

Time: 09:00 AM — 01:00 PM

Where: Child Mind Institute, 445 Park Avenue



Climbing the Ladder: Practicing Brave Talking Skills

Presented by Laura Kirmayer, PhD, MSW, Director of Brave Buddies Associate Psychologist, Anxiety and Mood Disorders Center

Wednesday, January 13, 2016

Time: 06:15 PM — 07:30 PM

Where: Child Mind Institute, 445 Park Avenue



Behavioral and Emotional Skills Training: A 1-day Workshop for Parents and Caregivers

Presented by Mandi Silverman, PsyD, MBA, Clinical Psychologist; ADHD and Disruptive Behavior Disorders Center &

Michelle Kaplan, LMSW, Clinical Social Worker

Friday, February 26, 2016

Time: 09:00 AM — 03:00 PM

Where: Child Mind Institute, 445 Park Avenue

Outline for Our Time Together

- Selective Mutism: 101 Abbreviated
- Treatment Plan
- Skills Training and Skills Drills
- Brief Introduction to 'Fade in' and Targeted Practice
 - Climbing the Ladder
- Questions and Discussion

SELECTIVE MUTISM: 101 ABBREVIATED

(Watch SM 101 from October 17th, 2015)



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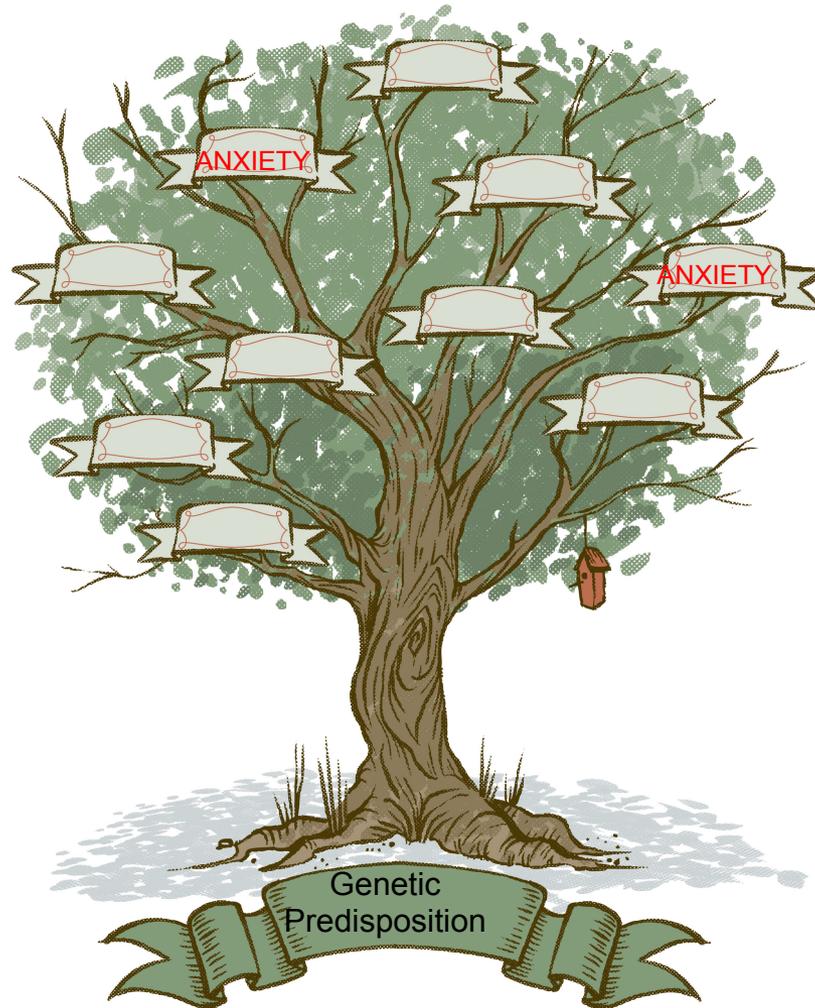
What is Selective Mutism (SM)?

- The inability to verbalize in specific social situations when speaking is expected (e.g. school, extra-curricular activities, play dates) despite the ability to verbalize fluently in other situations (e.g. home)
- Causes Impairment
- Duration for at least 1 month, not including the 1st month of school

Current Conceptualization of Selective Mutism

Nature *and* Nurture

Nature



Nurture



The Environment's
Role in Shaping the Inhibited
Stance



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Our treatment is a behavioral approach that focuses on the *environment's role in shaping the inhibited stance.

*Environment: Anyone (parent, teacher, peer, stranger...) prompting the child to engage verbally and/or behaviorally



**Environments Role
in Shaping the
Inhibited Stance**

**Negative
Reinforcement**

**Child is Prompted
to Engage Verbally
or Behaviorally**

**Child
Experiences
Distress &
Inhibits**

**Environment
Observes
Distress**

**Environment
Has Empathic
Response**

**Every One Feels
Relief**



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*Long Series of Negatively
Reinforced Interactions

Becomes Automatic

Rapid Fire on a Daily Basis



TREATMENT PLAN



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Treatment Goals

- Develop the child's capacity to manage anxiety related to speaking so that the child is able to overcome its impact (Building Brave Muscles)
- Increase number of people, settings and activities in which the child speaks responsively and spontaneously
- Diminish anxiety

Treatment Approach

- Behavioral Therapy (BT) or Combined BT & Medication
- Team Approach
 - Parents, teachers, caregivers
- Not Treatment As Usual ('TAU')
 - Intensive dose to build momentum
 - Targets generalization
- Simultaneous Treatment Trajectories
 - Team Skills Training
 - Child's Individual Trajectory
 - **Ongoing Assessment**



Psychoeducation

- This includes the child, parents, teachers and even friends and friends parents, store clerks and doormen!
- Treatment is transparent* and collaborative. We need everyone on board.
- Really important to debunk the myths that may interfere with how we approach the child and the anxiety

Build the 'Environments' Distress Tolerance

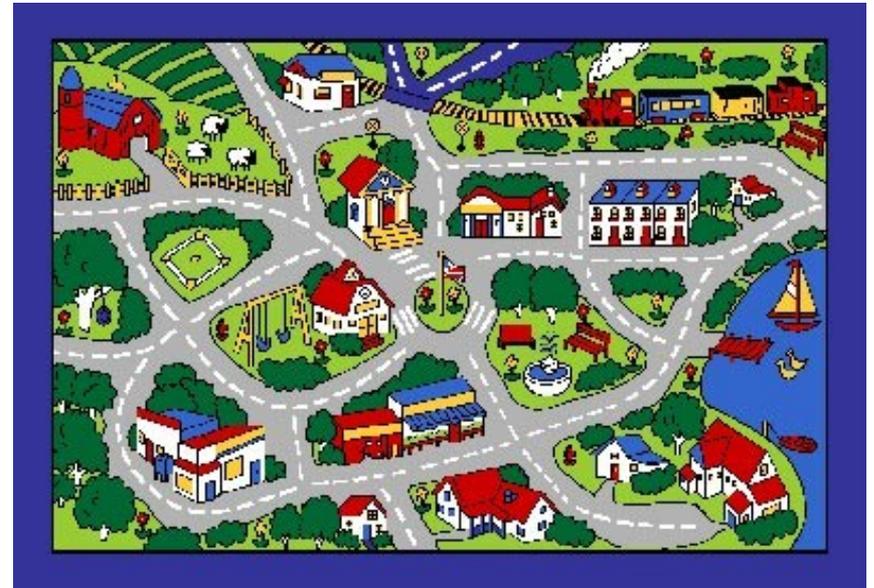
Natural instinct is to help a child in
distress.

We Start By Creating A Talking Map

Create one as we run through the
next slides...

Rigid Rules

- Kids with SM divide the world into those they talk with and those they don't
- Boundaries are not fluid
- Multiple variables influence these boundaries : People, Places and Activities



People, Places, and Activities

- Unique variations from child to child
- Treatment needs to be individualized to these variations
 - Same goal and same approach, but different starting points and different sized steps

TALKING MAP

	Home	School					Grandma's House	Gymnastics	Soccer	Store
		Main Classroom	Gym	Art	Music	Science				
Mom										
Dad										
Aunt Susie										
Grandma										
Siblings										
Teachers										
Peers										
Store Clerks										
Strangers										

Our goal is to fill this Talking Map with as many X's as possible. An X represents the child's ability to verbalize to this person, in this setting and/or activity.



The Contamination Effect



SKILLS TRAINING AND SKILLS DRILLS

Adaptation of Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) for Selective Mutism

- PCIT is an empirically supported treatment for *young* children with disruptive behavior disorders
- Adaptations have been developed for many populations outside of DBD
- Dr. Steven Kurtz developed the adaptation of PCIT for SM

SM Behavioral Skill Modules

- Child Directed Interaction (CDI)
 - Reward/ Reinforcement
- Verbalization Directed Interaction (VDI)
 - Exposure/ Approach Task
 - Effective sequences when prompting child to speak
- Fade-in
 - Passing the ‘talking baton’
 - Generalization
- Targeted Exposures
 - Climbing the Ladder(s)

NO QUESTIONS PLEASE!

Remove the expectation to speak
and build a comfort level

Child Directed Interaction (CDI)

PRIDE Skills

- Praise - Labeled Praise (LP)
- Reflect (RF)
- Imitate
- Describe- Behavior Descriptions (BD)
- Enthusiasm

****AVOID

- Questions, commands, criticism, sarcasm

AVOID MINDREADING!!!

Pull for the Narrative through
Behavior Descriptions!

ANY Verbalization...

**REFLECT and
LABELED PRAISE IT!**

Skill Drill

- 5 minutes
 - 10 behavioral descriptions
 - 10 labeled praise
 - reflect ALL verbalizations (if any)
 - 0 questions
 - 0 commands to verbalize
 - **0 mindreading



Gradually and Systematically

- Sensitize child to our presence with the CDI skill set
- Graduate the child to verbalize in our presence by systematically integrating the VDI skill set into CDI

Verbalization Directed Interactions (VDI)

Providing the child with opportunities to build brave muscles

The **PLANNED** and **INTENTIONAL** use of prompts for verbalizations in a graduated and systematic approach

Providing opportunities for the child to practice approaching instead of avoiding or becoming inhibited

VDI ***always*** follows warm-up with CDI and is ***never*** used alone. It is a CDI/VDI dance!

(CDI and VDI are integrated together)

Types of Verbalizations

- Sounds and Noises
- Responsive
 - Following a prompt (question or command)
- Spontaneous
 - Self initiated
- Socially 'Expected'
 - Hello, Good-bye, excuse me, please and thank you



Prompts for Verbalizations

Yes/No

- *“Do you want chocolate ice cream?”*

Forced Choice

- *“Do you want to get chocolate or vanilla?”*

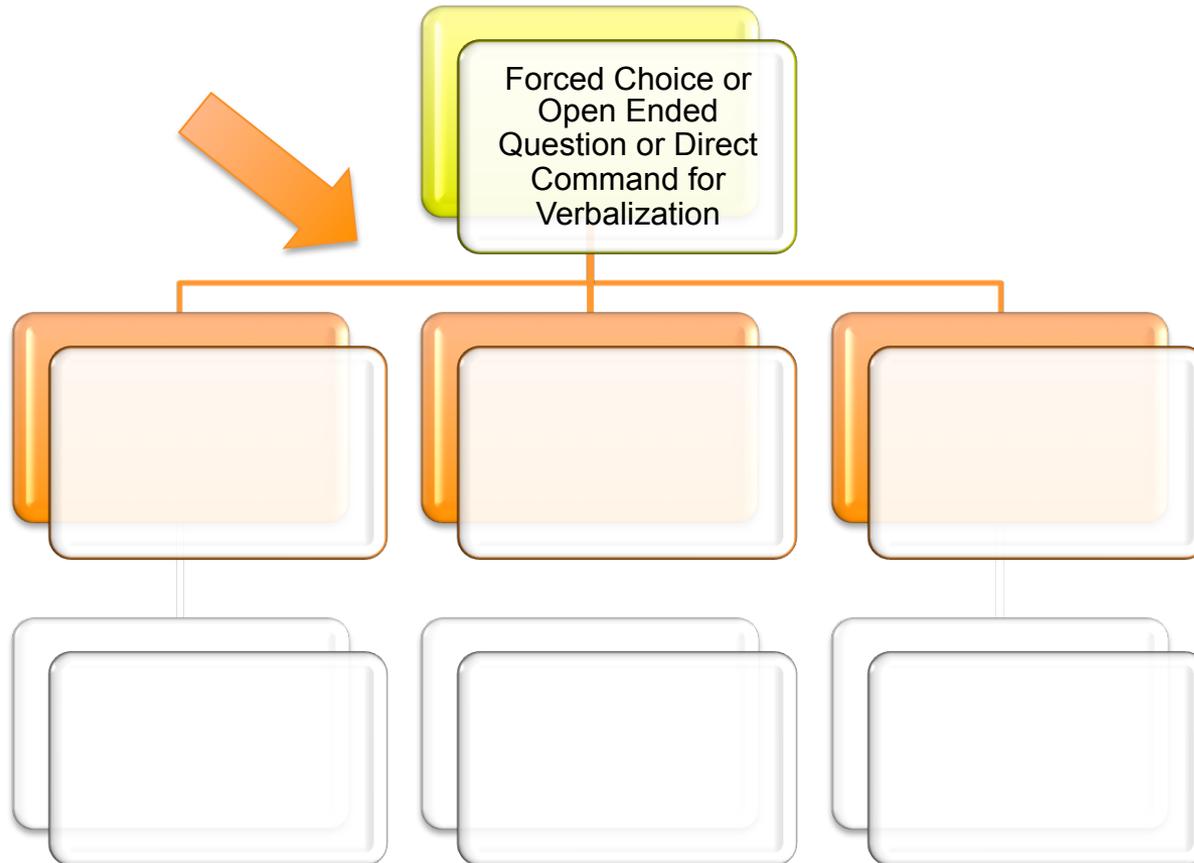
Open Ended

- *“What type of ice cream do you want to have?”*

Direct Command for Verbalization (DCV)

- *“Tell Laura what ice cream you want.”*

Effective VDI Sequence

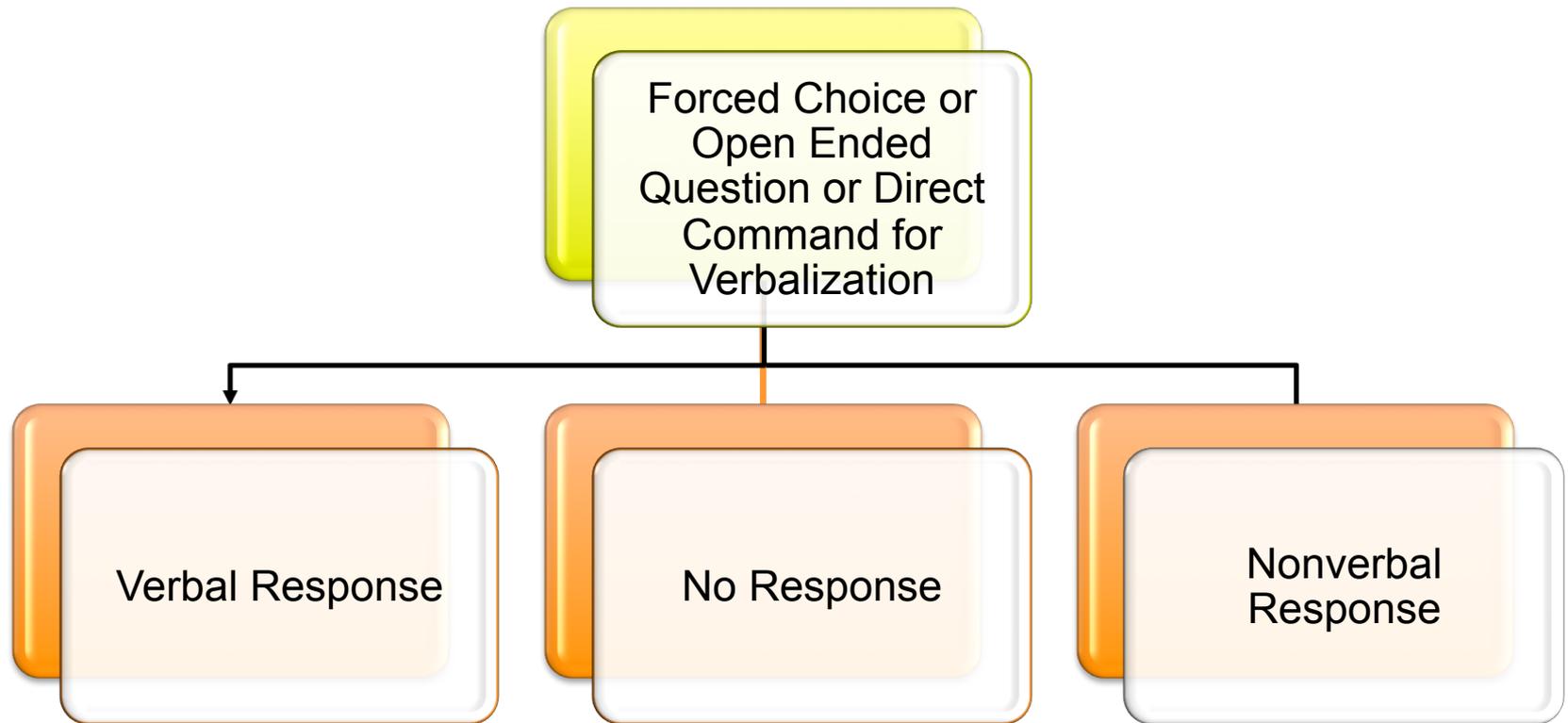


Wait 5 seconds

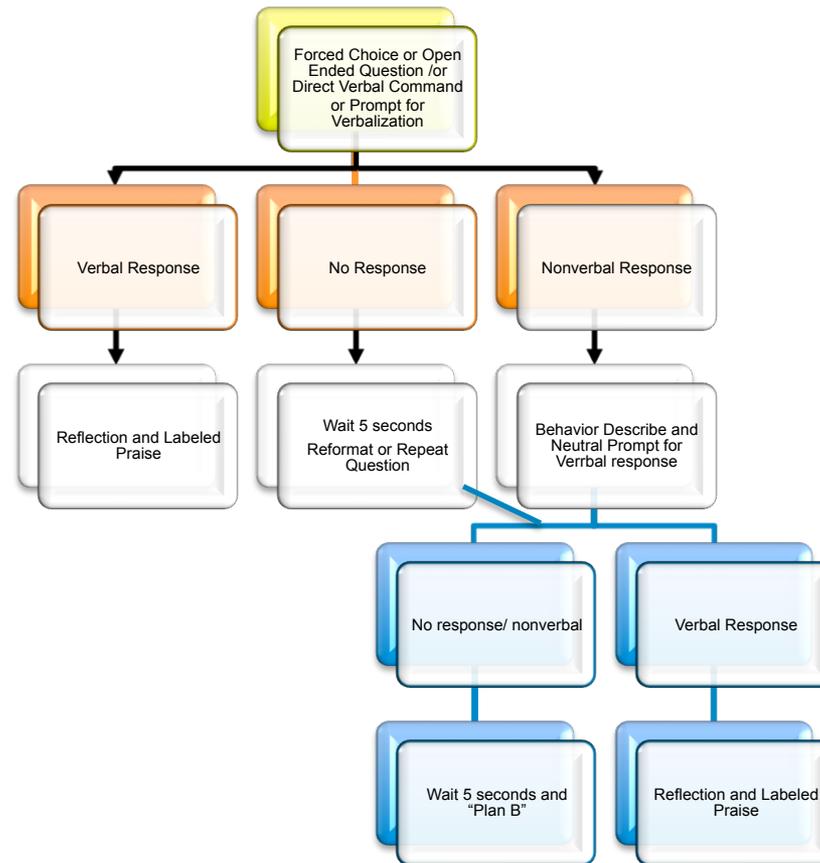
The longest 5 seconds ever...

DISTRESS TOLERANCE

Effective VDI Sequence



Effective VDI Sequence



Skill Drill

- Pacing of CDI with VDI
- Use of effective sequences
- Avoid mindreading

Daily Homework

- Attend to the cycle: awareness is crucial first step
- Monitor your use of questions or prompts to verbalize
- Practice the skills 5 minutes daily to gain mastery
 - Needs to become fluid, like a second language
- Refer to the 'talking map' and establish the first target
- Select planned and intentional situations to begin using the skills daily to build brave muscles
 - 2-3x a day

Games that Elicit Verbalizations (when in VDI!)

- Go Fish
- Zingo
- Hangman
- Headbandz
- Guess Who
- Surveys of Favorites
- Spot It
- Tell Tale

Example of 'Fading in':

- No expectation to speak (no questions)
- Speak to parent in our presence
- Speak to us with parent in the room
- Speak to us with parent no longer in the room
- Speak to us with a second person in the room...
 - *enabling versus accommodating

Targeted Practice

- The Special Sauce
 - Exposure: An exposure is an **Approach Task** that helps the child successfully encounter or experience the very thing that they have been avoiding
- Success- oriented
- Repetition-Consistency-Momentum
- Select 1-2 per situation/event

Some Tips to Set Up Class For Success...

- Meet child in classroom alone and graduate to verbalizations
 - “passing the baton”
- Meet child in class with a peer and graduate to verbalizations
 - Building momentum!
- Seating of child in the room
- Pairing child with a partner, a “buddy” (ideally a peer the child is familiar with)
- Setting up non-verbal plan for bathroom, emergency’s, requests for help...
- Once we are ready for verbalizations...
 - Asking several forced choice questions to peers prior to child
 - Plan a forced choice question, waiting 5 seconds and then moving on
 - Labeled praise after verbalization!

Helpful Resources

- www.childmind.org
- www.selectivemutism.org
- www.pcit.org
- www.selectivemutismlearning.org

DO'S AND DON'TS



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Do's

- **DO Label Praise for Talking**
 - **Example of Labeled Praise:** Thank you so much for telling me you want crackers for snack.
 - **Example of Labeled Praise:** I love how you told me that you're done with your worksheet.
 - **Rationale:** As opposed to an unlabeled praise ("Good job!"), a labeled praise reinforces and shapes a very specific behavior (talking), thus increasing the likelihood of more talking in the future. *Note: Cater Labeled Praise to the age and personality of the child. The enthusiasm and energy of a cheerleader may not be necessary or age appropriate. Find a style of praise that fits for the child. Some children may initially exhibit or even express discomfort with praise. This DOES NOT mean you should stop using praise, alternatively gradually build the child's tolerance for praise by repeated and continued use adjusting frequency, volume and enthusiasm.*
- **DO Reflect Verbalizations**
 - **Example of a Reflection:** You told me you need to go to the bathroom.
 - **Example of a Reflection:** "Seven! You told me the answer is seven."
 - **Rationale:** Reflections demonstrate that the individual is listening and attending to the child's verbalization, which also lets the child know that he or she was heard. Additionally, Reflections maintain a high rate of verbalizations between individuals and models an excellent use of language and listening skills.



Do's

- **DO be a Play-by-Play Announcer (Behavioral Descriptions)**
 - **Example Behavior Description:** You're putting your colored pencils back in the pencil case.
 - **Example Behavior Description:** You're tying your shoelaces.
 - **Rationale:** Behavior Descriptions let the child know that you are engaging with them, while also modeling proper and developed language. Additionally, Behavior Descriptions help you avoid mind-reading and pull for the child to elaborate or provide the verbal narrative related to what they are doing. *Note: You may want to use a slower rate of behavior descriptions depending on the age and personality of the child, as a higher rate may not be as age-appropriate for older children.*
- **DO Ask Forced Choice Questions**
 - **Example Forced Choice:** Do you want an apple or an orange with your lunch?
 - **Example Forced Choice:** Is your favorite color blue or something else?
 - **Example Forced Choice:** Does a hexagon have four sides or six sides, or are you not sure?
 - **Rationale:** Forced choice questions provide two concrete options for the child, which can help reduce anxiety about decision-making and verbalization. Forced choice questions also minimize the child's tendency to engage in a non-verbal response.



Do's

- **DO Ask Open Ended Questions**
 - **Example of Open Ended:** What did you eat for lunch today?
 - **Example of Open Ended:** What do you want to be when you grow up?
 - **Example of Open Ended:** What did you do over the weekend?
 - **Rationale:** As treatment progresses and the child develops a history of verbalizations with a specific individual, it is then appropriate to move on to asking open ended questions. Open ended questions can be more difficult for the child to answer, as it often requires decision-making, risk taking, or formulating one's own answer. Similar to Forced Choice Questions, Open ended questions minimize the child's tendency to engage in a non-verbal response.

- **DO Wait 5 Seconds to Respond**
 - **Example of Waiting 5 Seconds:** "Do you want animal crackers or pretzels?"
WAIT 5 SECONDS.... "Would you like animal crackers or pretzels?"
 - **Rationale:** After asking a forced choice or open-ended question, make sure to wait FIVE SECONDS before repeating the question. This gives the child a chance to process the question (some children with SM may also have processing issues) and formulate their answer. If the child does not respond after 5 seconds, repeat the question in a very neutral tone. It is important to wait five seconds between questions in order to give the child an opportunity to respond because if the child is asked too many questions with no opportunity to respond, a history of non-verbalization is created and may be further reinforced.

Don'ts

- **DO NOT Ask Yes/No Questions**

- **Example of Yes/No Questions:** Do you have your homework?
- **Example of Yes/No Questions:** Do you want snack?
- **Example of Yes/No Questions:** Are you ready to line-up?
- **Rationale:** Yes or no questions give the child an opportunity to use non-verbal responses (shaking/nodding head or pointing) while also creating a history of being non-verbal with the individual. *Note: If you accidentally ask a yes/no question and the child engages non-verbally, you can describe their behavior and reframe the question into a forced choice question. Example: “You are nodding. Do you have your homework... or do you not have your homework?”*

- **DO NOT Mind Read**

- **Example of Mind Reading:** (*Child is stacking blocks.*) “Looks like you are building a castle!”
- **Rationale:** Although the attempt to engage with the child is well intended, assuming that the blocks are a castle when in fact the child may think it is something completely different may be problematic. The child may not be at a point where he/she is able to verbalize and correct the individual, thus creating more anxiety around verbalizing.
- Alternatively, in this situation stick to Behavior Descriptions: “You are building with the blocks.” By simply describing what the child is doing you are positively attending to their behavior and your expressed interest may elicit the child’s desire to elaborate or give you the narrative.
- Child: “It is a castle”.



Don'ts

- **DO NOT Give Direct Prompts to Talk***
 - **Example of a Direct Prompt to Talk:** Tell me the answer to question number 5 on the worksheet.
 - **Example of a Direct Prompt to Talk:** Tell the visitor your name.
 - **Example of a Direct Prompt to Talk:** Turn to your partner and tell them your favorite color.
 - **Rationale:** The child may not be at a stage in treatment where he/she is able to succeed at verbally responding to the direct prompt. If the child then avoids responding to the direct prompt, this adds to the history of non-verbalization.
- **DO NOT Give Indirect Prompts to Talk***
 - **Example of Indirect Prompts to Talk:** Why don't you sing the song with us?
 - **Example of Indirect Prompts to Talk:** How about you tell me your favorite color?
 - **Example of Indirect Prompts to Talk:** Why don't you tell the class your name?
 - **Rationale:** The child may not be at a stage in treatment where they are able to succeed at verbally responding to the indirect prompt. Though the prompt to talk is framed in a different way, it has the same effect as a direct prompt and should be avoided.



Don'ts

- **DO NOT Prompt for Hello, Good-Bye, Thank You, Please***
 - **Example:** “Hello Sara...(pause indicating an expectation to respond with a Hello.”
 - **Example:** “Say Good-Bye to your teacher.”
 - **Example:** “Please say thank-you to your friend for handing you the worksheet.”
 - **Rationale:** Although we certainly want to instill pro-social skills and positive manners in all of our children, these are prompts to verbalize. A child’s inability to verbally engage in these interactions IS NOT an indication that they are being rude or that they do not use these manners. These prompts for verbalizations are often the most challenging for children with Selective Mutism to succeed in. The added expectation to verbalize in these interactions and anxiety about how others perceive their inability to respond, as well as the really high rate of daily prompts for these interactions likely make the degree of difficulty higher. Additionally, adults discomfort with a child not engaging in these societally expected forms of verbal communication could add to the perceived pressure around these interactions. Please provide non-verbal accommodations until a child is able to succeed verbally. Example: “Wave good-bye.”
- **DO NOT Use Negative Talk**
 - **Example of Negative Talk:** Don’t be shy.
 - **Example of Negative Talk:** You can’t go to recess until you answer my question.
 - **Example of Negative Talk:** It’s impolite to not say hello/please/thank you.
 - **Rationale:** Negative talk may cause the child to become more anxious about verbalizing and ultimately cause talking to be viewed as a form of punishment.



Next Workshop

Climbing the Ladder: Practicing Brave Talking Skills

Presented by Laura Kirmayer, PhD, MSW
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