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Intervening with Selective Mutism: The Nuts and Bolts of Behavioral Treatment

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Intervening with Selective Mutism: The Nuts and Bolts of Behavioral Treatment

Aimee Kotrba, PhD

www.selectivemutismtreatment.com

Learning Objectives

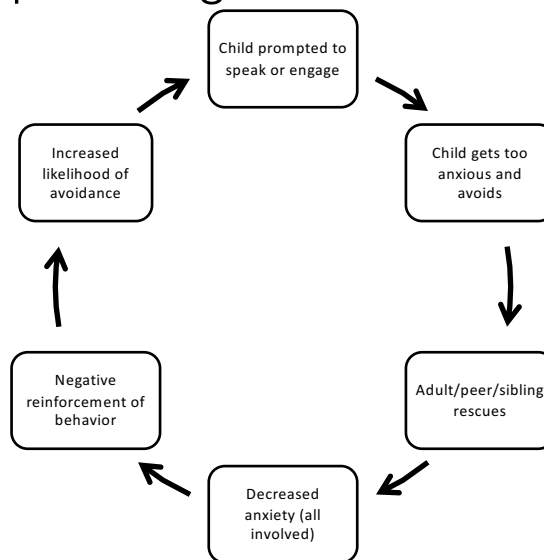
After this course, participants will be able to:

- Identify the correct starting point and tool for intervention based on evaluation.
- Describe how to develop a communication ladder for shaping.
- List instructions for stimulus fading for school or clinic setting.

DSM-V Criteria

- Consistent, ongoing failure to speak in specific social situations
- Interferes with education or social communication
- Not due to lack of language skills
- Other disorders (e.g., stuttering, PDD) have been ruled out
- A relatively rare childhood disorder, affecting approximately 1% of children in elementary school settings

Conceptualizing Selective Mutism



continued Choosing an Intervention

Speech Frequency (How?)	Communication Partners (Who?)	Setting Variable (Where?)	Intervention Recommended
Limited	Most people	Most environments	Contingency management
Typical	One or limited people	Most environments	Stimulus fading of new people in specific environments
Typical	Most people	One environment	Stimulus fading of environments
Limited	One or limited people	One environment	Stimulus fading of new people into comfortable environment AND stimulus fading of environments
No speech	No people	No environments	Shaping AND Stimulus fading of new people and environments

(Shriver, 2011)

continued

Psycho-education of Child

- Bibliotherapy
 - Cat's Got Your Tongue: A Story for Children Afraid to Speak
 - Charli's Choices
 - My Friend Daniel Doesn't Talk
- Treatment is explained in age-appropriate language to child – developing muscles
- Child is assured that the therapist will practice with them in becoming braver and stronger.

Psycho-education of Parents

- Selective mutism is conceptualized as a social anxiety disorder or specific fear
- Behavioral techniques are explained
 - Only way to “become brave” is to face fear with support
- Describe ways parents could prevent inadvertently reinforcing mutism
 - ❖ Speaking for child
 - ❖ Reducing developmental expectations
 - ❖ Avoiding social situations
 - ❖ Frustration, annoyance, forcing speech
- Medication as a possible adjunct treatment

Goal of Treatment

- NOT making anxiety go away!
 - Only way to retrain amygdala is through experience
- Learning to be “comfortable with discomfort!”
- To build distress tolerance, or grit, through facing fears.

Key Players -

- Desensitization is done by:
 - Psychologist/mental health professional outside school (helping with family training and public practice, consulting with school)
 - Parent
 - Keyworker – school personnel who is primarily in charge of:
 - Desensitizing (exposing)
 - Generalizing to all school environments
 - Communicating with teacher, parent, psychologist

Collaborating with Schools

- Education is given to schools about Selective Mutism
- Reframe avoidance as fear that can be faced
 - Schools shouldn't encourage avoidance
 - Reduce teacher frustration via education
- Child may be placed on IEP or Section 504 Plan
- Keyworker defined – person who will conduct “brave practices” with the child in the school
- Brave practices given by therapist to keyworker

Child Directed Interaction (CDI)

- PRIDE skills play (to build rapport)
 - P = labeled praise
 - R=reflection
 - I=imitation
 - D= behavioral description
 - E=excitement/enjoyment
- NO asking questions, giving commands, or teaching!!!

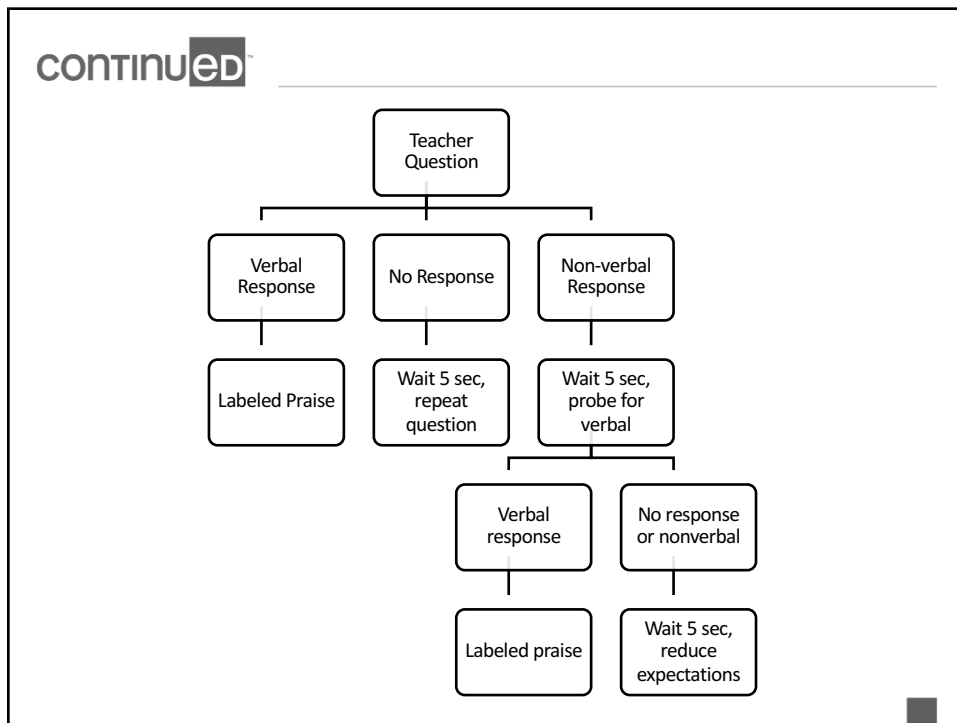
Verbal Directed Interaction (VDI)

Dos

- Labeled praise for talking
- Reflecting verbalizations
- Play-by-play announcer
- Forced choice/open ended questions
- Direct prompts to talk
- Wait 5 seconds

Don'ts

- Mind reading
- Yes/no questions
- Indirect commands
- Negative talk
- Enabling/rescuing



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Forced-Choice Questions

- Forced choice questions increase the likelihood of a verbal response!
 - Practice developing forced-choice questions.
 - What are you going to be for Halloween?
 - Do you want a brownie?
 - Do you have a sister?
 - What is your favorite school subject?
 - Do you remember where we are going on the field trip today?

Desensitization – Stimulus Fading and Shaping

- Research demonstrates effectiveness of behavioral intervention over all other interventions (Oerbeck et. al, 2013 and Bergman et. al, 2013)
- Stimulus fading – transitioning existing speech from a current communication partner to a new communication partner
- Shaping - Reinforcing successive approximations of verbalizations (communication ladder)
 - Initially reinforcing more frequently occurring behaviors (nonverbals, simple sounds, etc.)
 - Gradually reinforcing behaviors that approximate speech (words, sentences, etc.)

Stimulus Fading

- Gradually increasing the number of different people the child speaks to and settings the child speaks in
 - Gradually introducing new people into conversations
 - Speaking in new settings with the help of stimulus associated with speaking
 1. Communication partner
 2. Location where speech occurs
 3. Activity in which speech occurs

Example of Stimulus Fading – New People

- ❑ Child and psychologist are in a closed office, playing with a fun game/toy
- ❑ New communication partner (NCP) enters, pays no attention, moves slowly toward the interaction
- ❑ NCP arrives at interaction, begins to attend
- ❑ NCP begins to reflect and respond to child verbalizations
- ❑ NCP begins occasionally asking forced-choice questions
- ❑ Psychologist fades out of the interaction

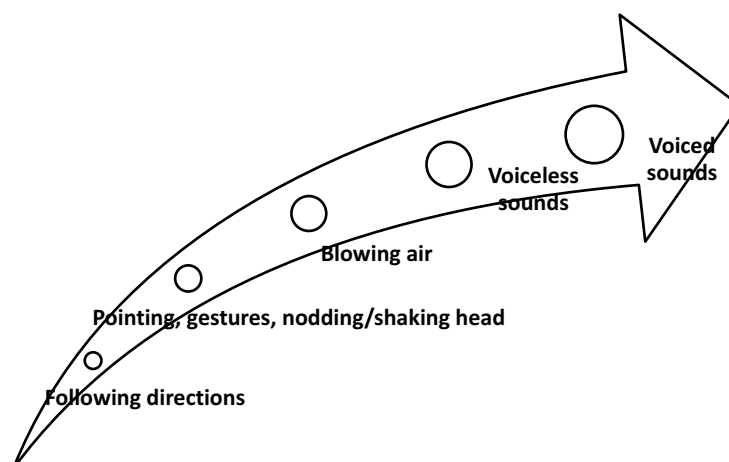
Ideas for Making Stimulus Fading Fun!

- Games that require speech – HeadsUp app, Guess Who, Go Fish, Headbanz
- Use technology – Voxer app, talking on phone
- Use reward system – NCP rewards
 - Token system
 - Mystery motivator
 - Wrapped prize
- Cut out verbal intermediary

When Is Shaping Used Instead of Fading?

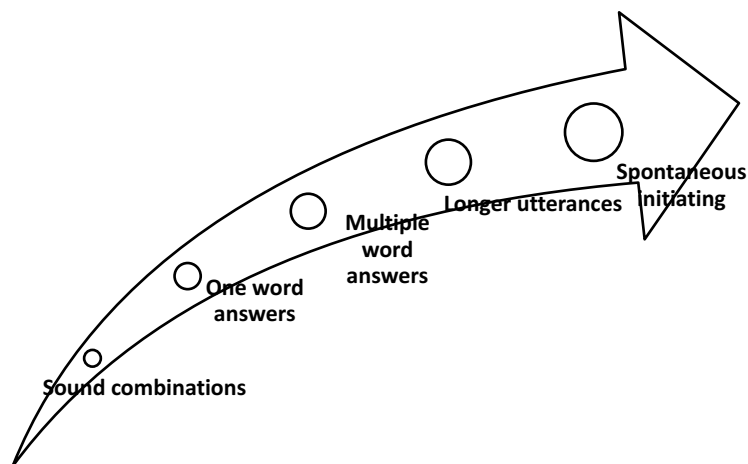
- When there is no pre-existing speech outside of the home setting
- If a child does talk outside of the home, make every attempt to do stimulus fading instead.
 - Quicker intervention
 - Easier
 - More naturalistic

Shaping - Communication Ladder



continued™

Shaping - Communication Ladder...continued



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Instructions for Shaping

- Start where the child currently functions
- Move to the next step when the child is responding consistently and without a lot of overt anxiety
- Can step back on the communication ladder if necessary to get a response

Try to avoid avoidance!

Activities for Communication Ladder

- **Following Directions** - attaching direction to high-likelihood activity, origami, Simon Says (no sounds), art projects, cooking
- **Gestures** - I Spy, Where's Waldo, finger play, making choices, yes/no questions, sign language, thumbs up/down, Tap To Talk app, Kids on Stage game
- **Facial expressions** – imitating mirror game, making feelings faces, Funny Faces board game
- **Body sounds** – snapping, clapping, stomping, musical instruments that don't require blowing

Activities for Communication Ladder

- **Blowing air** – bubbles, feathers, cottonball races, straws, pinwheels, straw painting, Free Candle app, Blow Balloon Pop app, BlowBlow app
- **Voiceless sounds** (s, t, p, k, h, f, sh, th) – snake sound, cottonball race with sounds, flat tire sound, pinwheel with sounds
- **Voiced sounds** – all other sounds (bilabials first), musical instruments
- **Combining into words** (y/es and n/o) – discrete sounds, closer together, combined into word, imitating word, use functionally

Activities for Communication Ladder

- **One-word response** (forced choice then open ended) – matching games, board games, making choices, fill in the blank or complete the sentence, Sparklefish app, Super Duper apps, Go Fish, Hangman, Old Maid, Battleship, Smarty Ears apps, hot/cold
- **Multiple word response, sentences, longer utterances** – telephone game, reading, songs, tv jingles, “tell me...,” role playing, what’s wrong pictures
- **Initiating** (scripted then spontaneous) – continue the story, Guess Who, Headbanz, imaginary play, show and tell, taking turns asking questions, telling jokes, wordless books, Toontastic app

Tracking School Brave Practices

Date:	Location:	Communication Partner:	Content of Speech:	Notes:
10/22	SLP's Office	Speech Pathologist	Named colors in game with one-word responses to forced-choice questions	Quiet but audible speech. Responded well to rewards.
10/25	Hallway	Speech Pathologist	Did Favorite's Game in public location	Notable reduction in volume when others came by.
10/31	SLP's Office	Speech Pathologist and Classroom Teacher	Played jenga game with questions while teacher faded in.	No reduction in volume; very brave!! :)

Community

Creating a Game plan

- Determine appropriate community practices: Child's anxiety level should always be the guide
- Fit practices into ordinary outings
- Use motivationally-driven situations whenever possible
- Preparing your child
 - Discuss why you're practicing
 - Quantifying anxiety (e.g., 1-5 scale, red/yellow/green light)
 - Consider environmental variables (e.g., time of day)
 - Discuss motivational factors
 - Rehearse several times
- Preparing the community person
 - Simple explanation of the purpose
 - Prompt the person with what you'd like to say (script it exactly!)
 - Don't be afraid to correct!

Tracking Community Brave Practices

Date:	Location:	Communication Partner:	Content of Speech:	Notes:
10/22	Red Robin	Server	Responded drink and food choices in one word answers ("Cheeseburger")	Loud environment; speech was audible
10/25	Target	3 Employees	Mom said "Where can we find.." and Lauren gave name of items	Speech became louder with each practice
10/31	Local	Neighbors	Said "Trick or Treat" with siblings at several homes	Visibly less anxious after each practice

Dealing with Well-Intentioned (But Unhelpful) community persons

- Community persons often make well-meaning mistakes:
 - Looking to the adult to speak for the child
 - Allow nonverbals
 - Encouraging nonverbals ("You can point to your choice")
 - Asking you what the child said
- Tips:
 - Prepare the person in advance (if possible)
 - Look at the child
 - Politely give them a script of what to say

Family Members

- Education
- Practice Partners
- Additional advocates in community settings

Extracurricular Activities

- Consider sharing some information
 - Quick facts regarding SM and ways to engage a child with SM
- Arrive early
- Playdates with teammates
- Visit the location periodically

Playdates

- Select a peer
- Prep the parents and the peer
- Set goal with your child (maybe!)
- Start in your home (keeping environment stable – stimulus associated with speech)
- Structure of playdate
 - Activities that elicit speech
 - Have child talk to you in front of peer
 - Be playful and fun
 - Consistency of practice
 - How to fade out

Dos and Don'ts of Intervention

Do....

- Work with school to create intervention plan
- Advocate for child
- Be creative with rewards, practices, goals, etc.
- Use stimulus associated **with** speech (you!) to elicit speech in school
- Identify avoidance and work toward *approach or scaffolding*

Don't....

- Allow avoidance to continue unchecked
- Rescue
- Plateau
- Forget about both responding AND initiating
- Say “don’t worry – no one will hear you!”
- Quit! ☺

continued™

Questions?

Find more information on:

- Assessing for Selective Mutism
- Treating plans
- Developing special education plans
- Working in conjunction with schools
- Helping parents become effective solicitors of communication

www.selectivemutismtreatment.com