



Supporting Children and Young People with Situational Mutism in Fife

A toolkit for young people with Situational Mutism and their families created by the Health & Social Care Partnership in Fife.

Contents

Introduction

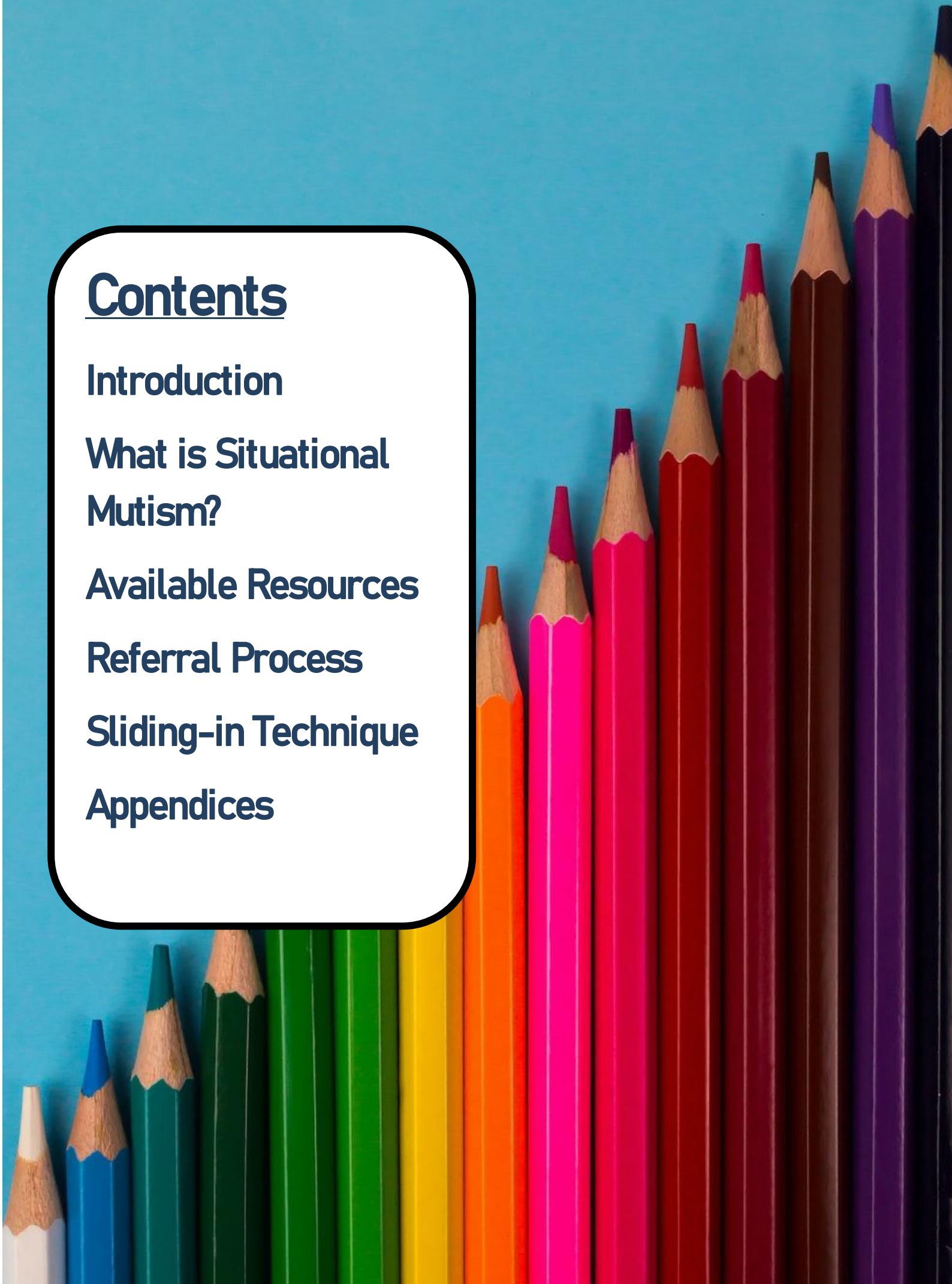
What is Situational
Mutism?

Available Resources

Referral Process

Sliding-in Technique

Appendices



Situational Mutism - Introduction

This toolkit aims to support families of young people with situational (previously selective) mutism. It has been created by a multi-service team including psychology, speech and language therapy and Fife education service. The toolkit aims to provide relevant information and resources to support young people with Situational Mutism and their families.

In the UK, The NHS suggests 0.71% of children are impacted by SM. Although this is quite low, SM can impact education, social interactions and communication so it is important we support YP with SM to reduce the negative impacts in these areas.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns, many YP with SM have not been able to continue with their intervention. We also expect to see an increase in SM as we exit the pandemic. This highlights the importance of a cross-service approach to ensure consistency and positive outcomes in line with the Scottish Governments '*Getting it Right for Every Child*' (GIRFEC) principles which aims to ensure all children are effectively supported by the relevant professionals, at the right time.



What is Situational Mutism?

Situational mutism is a term used for children who are able to speak but unable to do so. Children with SM are usually able to speak at home when trusted people are present. Some children may be able to speak to their peers at school, but not to teachers

To receive SM diagnosis, young people must exhibit this difficulty for more than one month, and this must not be during the first month of school.

Young people are often shy or nervous about new, unfamiliar situations so it's important to give them time to settle in before considering whether their difficulties could be SM

This difficulty also must hinder their educational ability and should not be accounted for by any other diagnosis, neither mental health nor developmentally related.

Myths about SM

Children with SM are refusing to speak

Children with SM have experienced trauma.

They will outgrow this phase and speak when they are ready.

Children with SM have speech problems and cannot speak.

They are being difficult or manipulative on purpose.

SM is a form of autism.

Children with SM are just shy.



Facts about SM

<1% of children in the UK have SM.

Girls are more likely to struggle than boys.

Additional speech and language difficulties may also be present
SM is considered an anxiety disorder

Available Resources

There are lots of resources you can look at with your family to understand more about SM and to gain support and ideas.

SMIRA

Situational Mutism Information and Research Association (SMIRA) is a support group for parents and professionals working with YP with SM. There is no cost for membership. SMIRA also has a Facebook group where members can download free resources and chat to each other. Adolescents have a separate Facebook group called SM Space Cafe.

SMA - Selective Mutism Association

Selective Mutism Association (SMA) provides information and resources for those affected by, and working with, young people with situational mutism.

Maggie Johnson's Selective Mutism Resource Manual including Sliding-in techniques worksheets

An evidence based manual produced to support professionals working with YP with SM. Resources from this manual are accessible and can be used by families also.

NHS Kent

NHS Kent have created a 5-session training programme for professionals working in services involved with the care of YP with SM. Each session has a 1-hour video and accompanying hand out slides and worksheets available to the general population on their website. The website highlights which sessions are most appropriate for each age group.

My Friend Daniel Doesn't Talk

A children's' story book written to help YP understand why someone with SM may not be able to talk in certain situations such as school. The book raises awareness and creates an age appropriate understanding of SM for YP in primary school age. This book is a useful resource for siblings, friends and peers of YP with SM to better understand why they might not speak and develop a sense of empathy towards this.

Referral process

Getting the right support for your child can be tricky to navigate. This is why NHS Fife and Fife Council Education services have together developed a Situational Mutism pathway for children in Fife. This pathway aims to support families and professionals in Fife to ensure care is being offered which meets individuals' needs.

If you have concerns regarding your child's communication in school, please contact their school to arrange a meeting to discuss how you can use the situational mutism resources.



The process will start with support from school. If further input is needed from psychology, speech and language or other services, school will be able to contact them to arrange this.

Sliding-in Technique

One method which school may want to explore alongside you is the sliding-in technique. This technique helps young people with situational mutism to practice talking with familiar adults. This gradually helps young people build up their speech and then begins applying this to other settings, such as the classroom.

All the worksheets required for the Sliding-in Technique are in Appendix A.

There are a few requirements which you should think about for this technique:

- The young person will begin working with an adult who they trust and already speak easily with, usually a parent. This person needs to be available to take part.
- You will need access to a private, quiet space where you won't be interrupted.
- Either work for a fixed time of 10-15 minutes, three to five times a week for a term OR allow one and a half to two hours for a single session
- The young person should know the reason for the sessions.
- Sessions will begin with young person talking to trusted adult on their own. A new person such as a teacher will gradually join and become part of the conversation. Ultimately, the trusted adult should be able to leave the room and young person will continue the conversation with new adult.



A case study example can be seen in Appendix B.

Appendices

Appendix A – Sliding-in Technique Worksheets

[P] = parent or trusted adult

[N] = name of child

[A] = new adult

Talking to a new person using the Sliding-in Technique:

Stage of one to one interaction* with new person and individual target milestones		Date achieved
N/A	Talk when alone with parent/other talking partner (e.g. keyworker) in a quiet room with no interruptions. New person does not need to be involved.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count to 20 with talking partner [P] and say other rote sequences such as the days of the week/months of the year/alphabet.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count with [P], knowing that new person [N] is a short distance away. [P] starts off the counting.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count with [P]; [N] is outside the closed door.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count with [P]; [N] is outside and door not shut properly.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count with [P]; [N] is outside and opens the door about 15cm towards end of counting.	
N/A	Take it in turns to count with [P]; [N] is outside and door open 15cm.	
4	Take it in turns to count with [P] and [N]; [N] stays outside and door is open 15cm.	
4	Take it in turns to count with [P] and [N]; [N] enters room while counting and i) stands by door, ii) approaches table, iii) sits at table.	
4	Take it in turns to count with [P] and [N], starting with N inside the room: i) standing by door, ii) sitting at table.	
4	Participate in turn-taking sequences for counting, days of the week and possibly months of the year/alphabet with [P] and [N] at the table, in both directions: i) takes turn after [P]; ii) takes turn after [N].	
4	Participate in structured single word turn-taking games/activities with [P] and [N], in both directions.	
4	Participate in structured sentence-level turn-taking games/activities with [P] and [N], in both directions: i) gives clues, ii) asks questions, iii) gives instructions.	
6/7	Participate in structured single word/sentence-level games/activities with [N], while [P] waits: i) across the room, ii) outside the room.	
7	Participate in structured sentence-level games/activities with [N]. i) [P] joins in at the end of the session, ii) [P] doesn't attend session.	
8	Use connected speech with [N] to: i) give instructions, ii) ask questions, iii) continue a conversation.	
*Model of Confident Talking: Stages of One to One Interaction (2015) Johnson and Wintgens		

Generalising speech from one to one interactions to the classroom:

Part 1

Summary of individual targets (Sections A., B. and C. may be carried out in tandem)		Date achieved
A. Sliding in new peers and staff to group activities (all targets take place with no-one else present)	Talk to keyworker in structured sentence-level activities on a one-to-one basis (in a private room outside the classroom or in classroom, no-one else present).	
	Talk to keyworker plus a peer of pupil's choice, working from single word to sentence-level activities.	
	Adding one peer at a time, talk to keyworker and up to 5 peers of pupil's choice in a structured sentence-level group activity.	
	Repeat group activities without keyworker support.	
	Talk to keyworker plus teacher, working from single word to sentence-level activities.	
	Complete a sentence-level activity with teacher; keyworker is not present	
	Complete a sentence-level activity with keyworker, teacher and up to 5 peers. Start with a low risk activity, e.g. reading aloud	
	Repeat group activities with different peers (keyworker and pupil take it in turns to choose next peer) <i>and/or</i> work in different locations (see section B) until at least half the class have heard the pupil talking.	
	Include classroom related topics/activities in group session.	

B. Structured activities in settings where pupil may be overheard	Repeat individual or group activities in other settings where the pupil is <i>unlikely</i> to be overheard, including the pupil's classroom (e.g. empty class at lunchtime, playground during lessons, vacated assembly hall)	
	Repeat individual or group activities in settings where the pupil may be overheard by a <i>few</i> people (e.g. original room with the door open, original room with peer(s) or adult(s) working separately at another table, dining room before lunch, corridor during lessons, table outside own classroom, corner of playground)	
	Repeat individual or group activities in settings where pupil may be overheard by <i>many</i> people (e.g. dining room at lunchtime, corridor between lessons, in museum during school trip, centre of playground)	

C. Preparation for transfer to class	The pupil has been reassured that they won't be picked to answer a question or read aloud in front of the class <i>unless they volunteer</i> .	
	Practise roll call in small group sessions	
	Half the class have heard the pupil talking outside the classroom <i>or</i> the whole class has heard a recording of the pupil's voice <i>and/or</i> pupil and teacher are confident that peers will not comment when the pupil starts to talk	

Part 2

Summary of individual targets (Sections A, B and C complete)		Date achieved
D. Transfer to classroom setting	Consider the pupil's positioning for the first three items, as they will not want the rest of the class to see their lips moving initially. *refers to peers that the pupil has spoken to comfortably in previous small group sessions.	
	With the rest of the class occupied, talk to keyworker at own table/work station during class time: a) on a one to one basis b) with other peers* seated at same table	
	With the rest of the class occupied, talk to peers* during class time: a) in a paired activity b) in a group activity	
	With the rest of the class occupied, talk or read to teacher at the pupil's table/work station or at the teacher's desk: a) on a one to one basis b) with other peers* seated nearby	
	As the pupil gains confidence talking to individuals and small groups in the classroom, move onto the final section where they talk in front of the whole class (flexible order)	
	Keyworker practices class activities in advance with the pupil or allows pupil to check their answer with them first to give pupil the confidence to put their hand up to answer a question or take their turn for a pre-arranged question	
	Take turn in a low-risk whole class activity involving a familiar rote sequence or reading aloud (e.g. go round class counting in twos, fives or tens; take part in a play-reading; read aloud from a powerpoint presentation assignment)	
	Participate verbally in roll call (can be made easier if pupils call out their number in the register, rather than 'Good morning' etc.)	
	Participate verbally in Circle Time when given warning/preparation time for topic/activity	
	Volunteer an answer without checking with keyworker	
	Participate verbally in Circle Time without warning of topic or answer unplanned question	
	Note any other contribution to class discussion, either prompted or voluntary:	

E. Talking in public places	Have lunch and chat with peers the pupil can talk to in group sessions.	
	Participate in class assembly by singing or speaking in unison.	
	Read aloud in a class assembly which includes a warm up activity such as singing or speaking in unison.	
	Work on a class assignment <i>outside the classroom</i> with peers the pupil can talk to (e.g. collect leaves and name as many different trees as possible).	
	Show a new or younger pupil around the school.	
	Talk to peers at afterschool club or other organised activity (e.g. on coach during school trip, in swimming pool changing room).	

Appendix B – Case Study

The below is an example of a young person, named Sarah, who moved from China to Scotland in Primary 2, exhibiting signs of situational mutism.

Sarah’s family contacted her school and requested a wellbeing meeting to discuss her difficulties speaking in social situations. Her class teacher was identified as the best person to support the implementation of the sliding-in technique.

With the required support from Sarah’s teachers and parents she is now doing well and able to comfortably take part in lessons and social activities at school.

It should be noted, below are examples of **some** of the steps followed by Sarah and her teacher. The needs of each child will differ and therefore the time frame and necessity to repeat steps will vary by child. As mentioned, it is essential to complete all steps of the Sliding-In technique at the pace of the child.

Date	Task	Sliding-in step
25 th Feb	Create a talking map showing different areas of the school with indication of how comfortable Sarah feels in that space. Allowed teacher to work out where in the school Sarah is most comfortable to undertake exposure work.	Identify key-worker in education for intervention.
27 th Feb	Take in turns to count to 20.	
28 th Feb	Create coloured blocks and describe them to each other.	
1 st Mar	Repeat coloured blocks activity.	
2 nd Mar	Read questions which had been written ahead of time to each other. Discussion around someone else joining for the next session. Sarah was most comfortable with her friend joining.	Identify peer to join intervention.
3 rd Mar	Repeated coloured counting to 20, coloured block and question activities with friend in the room. Discussed adding another adult into the room.	
5 th Mar	Introduced another teacher to the room. Completed above activities with another teacher present but standing in the corner facing away from us.	Identify another adult to join intervention. Slowly involving them in activities.
8 th Mar	Completed above activities with another teacher sitting at the table – not engaging in the conversation.	
10 th Mar	Introduced another child, Carly, from class to the room with myself and Sarah. Sarah counted to 20, described the blocks and answered questions with Carly at the table.	Introduce a different peer to join intervention.
14 th Mar	Played Guess Who with Carly in the classroom with no one else present.	
15 th Mar	Moved out with the classroom with Carly and Sarah. Counted to 20 in a space in the school where Sarah was initially less comfortable talking.	Move intervention to a different space.
16 th Mar	Addition of 2 more peers. Practiced counting in uncomfortable space with all 4 children and played Guess Who in a group of 4.	Add more peers into intervention.
18 th Mar	Repeated Guess Who activity with 4 children.	
20 th Mar	Repeated Guess Who with boys in classroom also involved.	Increase number of peers present for intervention.

23 rd Mar	Took the register using counting and Sarah was able to call her number when it was her turn.	Encourage talking in front of whole class.
24 th Mar	Used counting to take the register again. Will continue to use this daily. After seeing a lot of progress for Sarah on a recent school trip I have asked Sarah's Mum to try and organise some activities with other children during the Easter Break.	
14 th Apr	First morning back after Easter Break. I said Good Morning to Sarah and she replied 'Good Morning' in front of the class. Her Mum told me she had some play dates over the holidays which had gone well.	
16 th Apr	Sarah put her hand up in class today to answer a question.	
18 th Apr	We are keeping an eye on Sarah's continued progress and organising for her new teacher to be slowly introduced to her environment so she can get to know her and feel comfortable speaking with her.	