



Speech Differences

“The thing is, even with a constraint you can do all things because the spirit inside of you is stronger than what is in your way.” -Chris Klein, using AAC

Tips for interacting with people with Mutism or Selective Mutism

Muteness or Mutism is a speech condition where the individual is unable to speak and results in the absence or significant loss of verbal communication. This may be caused by a physical or developmental impairment. Selective Mutism is where the individual is not able to speak in specific situations. This may be present in those with autism or anxiety disorders. Staff and loved ones who know the person well can help you learn how best to interact.

- Ask about the best way to communicate (device, letter board, talking machine, texting, paper and pen, yes/no answers, etc.).
- Be patient and open to learning how to communicate. Let the person know if you are not able to understand and keep trying.
- Assume the person understands what you are saying. They may also be able to understand your nonverbal language like body gestures and facial expressions.
- Vocalizations like grunts or moans may be part of this person’s speech. The more time you listen and spend time together, the more you will be able to distinguish between sounds for communication. Staff can also help with this.
- Communication may include formal signing or natural gestures. Look for context cues to figure out what they are trying to communicate.
- Behaviors are a form of communication. Being present and talking with the individual brings dignity to your interactions.

References

- *25 Tips for Communicating with People with Little or No Speech in Clinical Settings*, Dr. Bronwyn Hemsley, bronwynhemsley.wordpress.com/about/25-tips-for-communicating-with-people-with-little-or-no-speech-in-clinical-settings/
- “How to Communicate with a Non-Verbal Autistic Child,” *Fostering a Child with Autism*, thefca.co.uk/fostering-autistic-children/communicating-with-a-nonverbal-child/
- Speaking Tips, With Ministries: withministries.org/adapting-the-sessions-to-the-needs-of-your-group/