

Helping Reluctant Talkers

Children who are reluctant to talk will need lots of help and support to feel confident and happy to communicate with other children and adults. Here are some ways to help:

- **Create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere** for the child
- **Avoid too much eye contact.** Direct eye contact can be intense and make a child feel under pressure and anxious
- It might be easier for the child to **work in pairs or a small group**, instead of in a whole class
- Think about how you can **adapt tasks and activities to involve the child without them having to talk out loud** e.g. let them –
 - Turn the pages of a book at story time
 - Collect or give out the food/drink at snack time
 - Collect or give out equipment to the other children
 - Take the class register to the office
- Try to **identify one key staff member** in school who the child can work with to build a relationship and feel confident.
- **Encourage home-school connections** to bridge the gap between settings e.g. use a home-school diary between parents and school staff. Consider sending the child's class work home e.g. art/craft work, or vice-versa. Allow the child to bring in show and tell objects to school.
- Try to **avoid asking the child direct questions.** This can be hard, but remember how scary answering a question can be! Remember that it is ok for the child to answer you without talking e.g. by a nod/shake of the head or by pointing
- **Reduce the amount of questions you ask, and instead comment** on what the child is doing when they are playing. This reduces the pressure and anxiety the child may feel when you ask them a question. It will encourage them to start to communicate with you on their own terms, when they are ready.
- If you do have to ask a question e.g. to ask a choice, start by telling the child to 'point' to the one they choose instead of having to 'say'. E.g. you say "Point to the one you'd like" or "Show me the one you'd like". You don't want to stop the child from making choices, so do it in a way that makes them feel at ease.
- If you have to ask the child a question, **give them lots of time to respond.** Children need more time to think about what you have said before they can create an answer. By giving your child time to answer you, you are reducing the pressure on them rushing an answer.
- **Give the child lots of encouragement and praise** to interact with other children

Created by Chris Robinson

© Speech & Language Therapy, Humber NHS Foundation Trust

