

SOMETIMES IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO TALK ...



Selective Mutism is a little known condition, especially concerning adults. It usually begins in childhood, although can strike at any age.

A person affected by selective mutism is believed to suffer from **an extreme 'freeze' response** to stress and anxiety which is beyond their conscious control. It has been discovered that a sufferer's vocal chords literally freeze, making speech impossible in certain social or anxiety-provoking situations.

For adults who find themselves affected it can be particularly difficult to deal with, as there is a widely held belief that selective mutism is a childhood condition – something that is likely to improve with age. Unfortunately this is not the case. Selective mutism is a condition that is most easily treatable in young children, but even then it requires sensitivity and understanding by all involved and can take years to overcome. For people who do not receive the treatment they require, the behaviour associated with selective mutism is likely to become more entrenched and can often develop into further anxiety and depressive states.

Even for people who are able to manage their symptoms, the highly sensitive nature of most people with selective mutism can make life difficult to navigate, and in times of extreme stress or anxiety it is possible that difficulties with speech and connection can resurface. This can be extremely difficult for affected adults to deal with, especially since selective mutism is not something that is widely known or associated with adults.

Affected people can often feel isolated, dysfunctional and struggle to maintain a sense of balance and control. They usually crave feelings of connection and belonging, but social pressures can bring on intense reactions, resulting in the opposite.

You may be, or you may know of someone who sometimes finds it impossible to speak, initiate conversation or make or maintain eye contact.

VOICE for Selective Mutism is a New Zealand charity working to raise awareness of this disorder, which sadly affects many people who do not receive the acceptance or understanding they deserve. These people are usually intelligent, conscientious, creative individuals who long for their voice to be heard. Empathy, acceptance and acknowledgment of all communication without pressure or expectation will go a long way to helping people with selective mutism to connect with their true voices and achieve their potential.

If you are interested in learning more about this condition, please visit us online at www.selectivemutism.org.nz

