Many children find it difficult to talk confidently in a new setting. They may use lots of language at home but say less in the pre-school setting. There are many different reasons for this: the child may have a ‘shy’ personality or be naturally quiet, or there may be few reasons to talk in the setting as lots of play can happen without a great deal of speaking and they may be able to access everything they want (e.g. toys, snack) without needing to talk about it. The important thing is to avoid speaking in a way that makes the child feel very conscious of their talking, or feel pressure to talk.

A few ideas to support quiet children in the setting

- **Reduce pressure to talk.** Consider your routines and avoid situations where children must reply (e.g. morning register or snack time). Acknowledge other ways of communicating (nodding, pointing, pictures, objects) rather than telling them they must use words.
- **Create cosy spaces.** Some children are more confident speaking to peers out of the direct view of adults. Create small, quiet spaces where children can talk together.
- **Share things together.** Talk with parents about bringing in treasure boxes from home. Share these with children in a quiet environment. Talk about the objects but avoid direct questions. For example, instead of “A shell. Did you go to the beach?” try “That’s a pretty shell. It looks like it came from a sandy beach”.
- **Consider your language.** How do you talk about children in front of others? Do you praise their efforts? Try to acknowledge that children are developing their talking, rather than saying they choose not to talk.

A word on Selective Mutism

Many children may find it difficult to talk outside of the home but this does not mean that they have Selective Mutism. This is a diagnosis that is made by a Psychologist only after careful assessment and discussion with those involved. If you have particular concerns about a child in your care, you can refer to your local NHS Speech and Language Therapy service to rule out any concerns about underlying language difficulties.