

In 2005, for a Masters research project, I completed a case study on a Kindergartener who was displaying traits of Selective Mutism as defined by the American Psychiatric Association, DSM-IV, 1994. As of the end of November 2004, this boy had not spoken to any adults in his classroom, although he was speaking to some other children and he was able to converse freely with the members of his immediate family. The previous year, in Pre School, he had begun to talk some to the classroom aid by the end of the year after she had made an effort to play a table game he liked with him every day. Soon after I began visiting the classroom to gather information, though, the boy began conversing with me. Part of my research then turned toward analyzing how that came about. It appears that the non confrontational approach modeled by Michael Grinder may have been a major factor in that result.

I had worked with the boy occasionally in PE from the beginning of the school year when I was assisting the teacher there. At the end of November I began visiting the classroom 2 or 3 days a week. At first he would communicate non verbally by holding up something he wanted me to see. When he did that, or when I would ask him a question, I would move next to him and focus our attention on something other than looking at each other. The second through fourth day I was in the class he answered me in single words or phrases. On the fifth day the phrases turned into full conversation. Twice after that, in December, he spoke to his teacher when he was focused on something other than her face, but that was all until the end of April.

I observed that most adults would face him and try to make eye contact with him when they asked him a question. After I had analyzed some of my information, I advised the adults that worked with him in the classroom to try to get next to him and focus their attention on something in front of them when they needed to ask him something. I also did some other interventions to help the boy adjust to talking to his teacher. When I finished the project at the end of April he was beginning to speak to the teacher in phrases and to other adults in single words. He continued to increase the amount of his speaking and the adults he spoke to after that.

It is possible he was almost ready to speak when I entered the classroom, so I only happened to be there when it happened. However, I believe the quickness of his change toward me, and then the pattern of his response to others, raises a question for more research into the effect of the non confrontational approach on children displaying selective mutism traits.

If you would like more information about my research you may contact me, Jean Pope, at P.O. Box 1638, Longview, WA 98632, or email me at tesataone@hotmail.com.