



Parents helping kids with selective mutism: What's too much? What's not enough?

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This webinar was made possible thanks to a generous grant from the Gordon and Marilyn Macklin Foundation

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Current Conceptualization of SM

- SM is a solution to the problem
- Works in the short term, but not in the long term




Kurtz Psychology

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The Nature Part

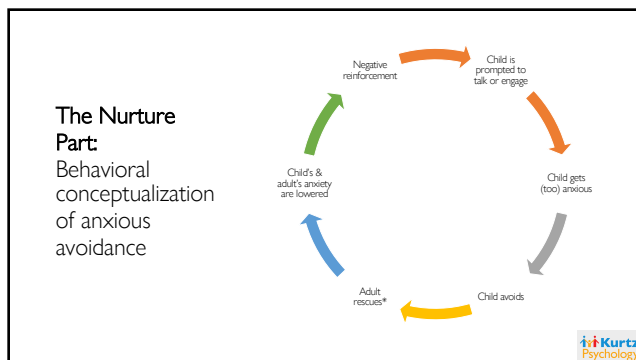
- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree...
- 75% of our children with SM have one or both parents with either:
 - SM
 - Social phobia
 - Sub-clinical interpersonal anxiety sufficient to be impairing
- *Predisposition to be behaviorally inhibited
 - Detectable incredibly early in life
 - Stable pattern of response



* See work of Jerome Kagan


Kurtz Psychology

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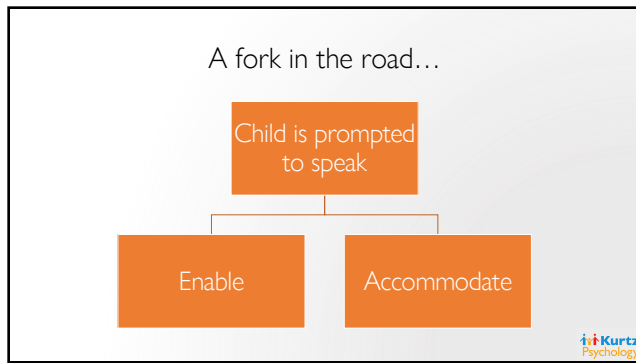
Caregivers are the agents of change to reverse this pattern



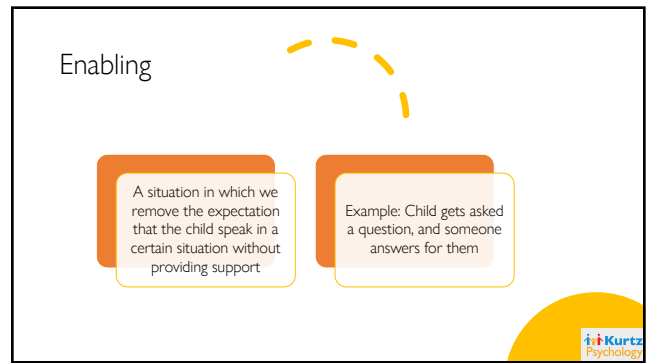
Agent of Change

Kurtz Psychology

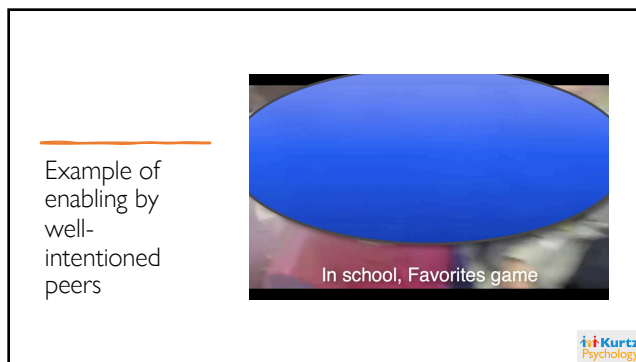
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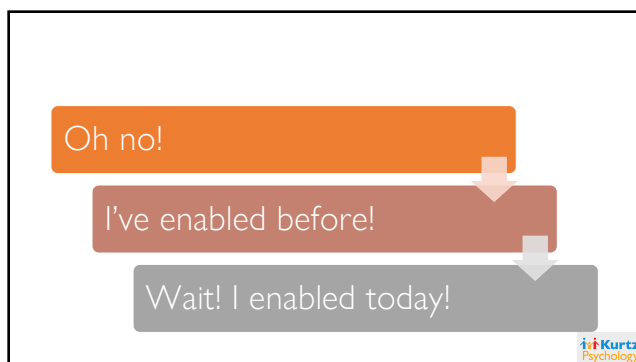


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Positives and "Negatives" of Enabling

Positive	"Negative"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is coming from a loving place! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Who wants to see their child in distress?! Demonstrates how much your child trusts you <ul style="list-style-type: none"> And trust is so important in this treatment When used intentionally, can be the more appropriate choice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child does not have any opportunity to practice Strengthens the habit of avoidance Strengthens others' perceptions that they are the child who doesn't talk May be demoralizing Decreases self-efficacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The belief you can do the behavior

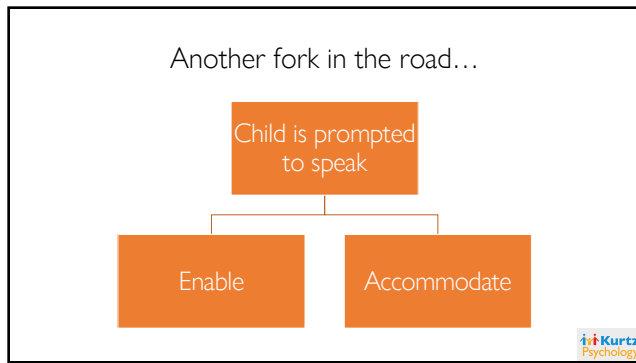
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You. Are. Human.

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Accommodation

- ✗ Not 504 or IEP accommodations
- ✗ Not negative!
- ✓ The supports you put into place to help your child achieve a goal
 - Remember, the goal might still be difficult- but it is attainable

Example: Your child whispers their ice cream order to you, and you reflect it to the person behind the counter

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Example of Accommodation of a child who has never spoken in class

Student made video of presentation in private room with DRK

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Positives and "Negatives" of Accommodation

Positives	"Negative"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reverses the spiral of avoidant child behavior maintained by negative reinforcement • Builds distress tolerance for you and your child • Provides your child with practice in brave talking in a systematic way • Builds confidence and self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not always easy! <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May need to try more than one strategy to be successful • Requires time, patience, and planning

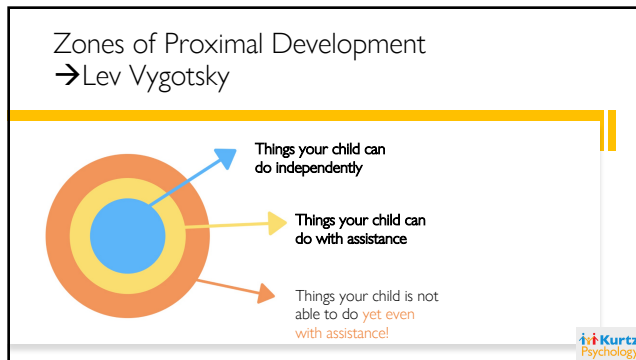
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How do I know what to accommodate or enable?

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- ### Questions to ask yourself before you engage with your anxious child:
1. Which "talking zone" does this situation fall into? (e.g. green, yellow, or red)
 2. Am I making this choice because it will help my child cope more effectively next time (become independent) or am I helping my child avoid and unintentionally reinforce their fear (remain dependent)?
 3. Am I making this choice because I feel distressed, or is this an opportunity to remind myself that I am doing this for my child?
 4. Is this the right time for this practice? (e.g., is my child hungry, tired, sick, are we in a rush?)
 5. How can I break down this situation so I can accommodate and avoid enabling?

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How to effectively accommodate

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Shaping

- A procedure used to establish a behavior that is not presently performed by an individual.
- Reinforce small steps towards more complex behavior.

* See work of B.F. Skinner

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Shaping: Ordering Ice Cream

Ordering ice cream at counter

- Practicing order with others when possible (e.g., other caregiver, siblings, peer)
- Practicing order with comfortable adult in the store
- Continue practicing order on the way (in car, on walk there, outside of store)
- Practicing with others when possible (e.g., other caregiver, siblings)
- Responding to comfortable adult's prompt "What flavor can I get you?" in familiar setting
- Responding to comfortable adult's FC question in familiar setting (e.g., home, "Do you want vanilla or chocolate?")


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Shaping Strategies

- **Incentives for target behavior**
 - 1 sticker for 1-word responses; 3 stickers for full sentences
- **Full sentences: Fill-in-the-blank approach**
 - Parent starts, child finishes
 - Increasing # of word child says each time
- **Generating questions**
 - Providing 2 question scripts to choose from
 - Providing 2 question topics to choose from
 - Prompting child to generate topic & question

When your kiddo is stuck, break down the target behavior


1. **Go back to last place of success & rehearse with lower difficulty items**
 - e.g., practice sharing with parent and adult counselors
2. **State expectation & Incentive** (if needed for motivation)
 - e.g., "This time for 3 stickers, tell [peer] the weather by us"



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Shaping: Points to Remember

- Shaping is about breaking down the task to help your child be successful
- **Practice** will give you and your child confidence in verbal exposures
- Every child will require a different level of support to break a task down
 - There are many ways to break down the same task, so if you don't see results, try something different or look for a way to break it down further
- If you see your child getting "stuck," you can always return to the place of last success and warm-up again



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How do I know when to pull back some of my supports?


- Increased independence – not requiring as much parent support (e.g., speaking in a full sentence without prompting)
- Decreased visible anxiety
 - More eye contact, more behaviorally engaged, less inhibited in body language
- Decreased latency
- Success on multiple instances



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What do I say to my child in the moment?

- You know your child the best!
- Transparency
 - "We are working on our brave talking"
 - "Here is what you are working on today"
- Example script:
 - "Sometimes its hard to talk to new people and in new places! And we are here to practice so it gets a little less tricky!"
 - "I know that talking can be scary and I know you can do it"



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Scenarios!




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What if...

Your child has been consistently practicing attendance for school (e.g., saying "here") and has had success with practicing in the classroom when no one else is there.

You tell the teacher that for now, please have the child practice attendance in a small group instead of in front of the whole classroom.

Did you enable or accommodate?



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What if...

Your child is working on asking questions to peers.

When it is their turn to ask a rehearsed question, they become stuck.

You tell them to ask you the question first.

Did you enable or accommodate?



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What if...

Your child has been practicing ordering ice cream.

When it is their turn to order, they point to the ice cream flavor they want.



You tell the server that they will have vanilla.

Did you enable or accommodate?



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“...Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping small children or others who may need your assistance.”



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