

# Selective Mutism

## What is Selective Mutism?

**Selective Mutism (SM)** is characterized by a persistent failure to speak in one or more social situations for at least 1 month. Children usually develop SM before the age of 5, however it may not be diagnosed until school-age when the disturbance becomes more noticeable and interfering. Children with selective mutism are usually able to speak comfortably at home and with their immediate family. But in less familiar settings or when with unfamiliar people, children may refuse to speak or feel unable to speak. SM is considered to be an anxiety disorder. Children with SM may also be excessively shy, show significant social anxiety or fear of embarrassment, and may at times prefer to be isolated and withdrawn. Children with SM may communicate using the following nonverbal behavior around less familiar people:

### **Gesturing**

### **Nodding or shaking their head**

### **Pulling or pushing**

### **Using only short (often inaudible) phrases**

### **Whispering**

Selective mutism can be associated with considerable life impairment, reduced quality of life, and interference with family, school, and peer functioning.

For more information, contact the MINT program at 305.348.7836 or [TheMintProgram@gmail.com](mailto:TheMintProgram@gmail.com)



## HOW CAN I HELP?

### **Warm up**

A child with SM may feel anxious around a new person. Warm up with them using these skills

- **Praise (Labeled)**

Praise the child for any pro-social behavior such as eye contact. Praise them on their talents, interests, etc. Label your praises by attaching a behavior to it. Examples of labeled praises are “Great job coloring in the lines”, “I love how you are staying here and playing with me”, “Great job using your brave voice!”

- **Reflect**

If the child speaks in front of or to you at any point, repeat or paraphrase what they said back at them.

- **Describe**

Describe what the child is doing by saying things like “you are choosing the red crayon now”. This will show that you are interested in what they are doing.

### **Questions**

Avoid asking a child with SM questions while warming up. When it’s time to ask a question use a forced-choice or open-ended question. Allow them 5-10 seconds to answer question and praise them when they do. If child uses a non-verbal behavior to answer, do not interpret it, instead describe it and prompt for a verbal response.



## Selective Mutism Treatment Guidelines

- Use guided, graduated talking exposures to encourage speaking with others
  - Positive reinforcement system in place should be continued to encourage child to participate in more challenging shaping exposures.
  - Example: “You earned a sticker for whispering your answer to me while the class is present.” “In order to earn the next sticker, you will have to whisper to me from a hand’s length away”
  - Over time, shaping exposures should occur in which students from child’s classroom are gradually introduced into the child’s speaking circle.
  - Child is expected to gradually answer teacher/staff’s questions at further distances while in front of the class until responding typically to all classroom queries.
- To warm-up with child meeting for 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> time, try and only describe the child’s (moment-by-moment) behavior as if you were play-by-play announcer and give labeled praises (described below)
  - Examples: “You’re putting the ball on the floor,” “you’re kicking the ball to me”
  - Stay away from questions during short warm-up period
- Use specific labeled praises of “Brave Talking” or other types of positive reinforcement (i.e., rewards, stickers) when child speaks to others in the school and classroom settings.
  - Examples: “Great brave talking,” “Thanks for using your words,” “Thanks for answering me,” “Thanks for your using your loud voice”
- Reflect (repeat back or paraphrase)child’s verbalizations
  - Example: Teacher asks “Do you want the purple marker or the blue marker?”  
Child responds “Purple”  
Teacher reflects “You want the purple marker”
  - If child whispers to teacher/staff only, the teacher/staff should reflect aloud to others (e.g., Child just told me that he wants to use the purple marker)
  - Allows other children to know and be aware of the fact that the child does speak
- Use specific types of questions to elicit verbalizations and answers from child
  - Open-ended questions (e.g., What color marker would you like to use?)
  - Forced-choice questions (e.g., Do you want the red marker or the blue marker?)
    - Gives child the answers so that they do not have to think of answer on their own
    - Often easier than open-ended questions
  - Stay away from Yes/No questions (e.g., Do you want the red crayon?).
    - Yes/no questions give child the opportunity to use non-verbal responses to answer questions, making it less likely for her to give a verbal reply.
- Do not “Mind-Read” the child’s non-verbal behaviors (e.g., nodding their head yes, pointing) and only describe these non-verbal behaviors (e.g., “I see you nodding” or “I see you pointing”)
- Wait approximately five seconds for child to respond to a question
  - Repeat the question and wait, up to 3 times, and then move on if child does not answer.
  - Gives child opportunity to respond to the question without adult/child rescue
  - Do not enable the child’s mutism
  - If child is struggling to respond, role-play/rehearse with the child in the hallway or separate space, and then have child either answer aloud, or whisper to teacher/staff in front of class.
- The use of technology (e.g., audio recordings and video feedforward) could be included to help ease the transition of speaking in person to others.

## CDI Rules

DO's	REASON	EXAMPLES
<p><b>PRAISE</b></p> <p>Labeled Praises tell your child exactly what you like</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases the behavior that is praised</li> <li>• Shows approval</li> <li>• Improves child's self-esteem</li> <li>• Makes child feel good</li> </ul>	<p>Good job with that tower            You drew a pretty tree            Nice drawing            Thank you for sharing            I like how gently you're putting the crayons away</p>
<p><b>REFLECT</b></p> <p>Reflections repeat or paraphrase what your child says</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets child lead the conversation</li> <li>• Shows interest</li> <li>• Demonstrates acceptance and understanding</li> <li>• Improves child's speech</li> <li>• Increases verbal communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child: I drew a tree            Parent: Yes, you made a tree</li> <li>• Child: Doggy has a black nose            Parent: The dog's nose is black</li> <li>• Child: I like to play with blocks            Parent: You're having fun with the blocks</li> </ul>
<p><b>IMITATE</b></p> <p>Imitation copies what your child is doing with the toys</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets your child lead.</li> <li>• Shows child you approve of his/her game</li> <li>• Makes the game fun for your child</li> <li>• Increases the child's imitation of the things that you do</li> <li>• Teaches your child how to play with others and take turns</li> </ul>	<p>Child: I put a nose on the potato head.            Parent: I'm putting a nose on Mr. Potato Head too.</p> <p>Child: (drawing circles on a piece of paper).            Parent: I'm drawing circles on my paper just like you.</p>
<p><b>DESCRIBE</b></p> <p>Behavioral Descriptions say what your child is doing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets child lead the play</li> <li>• Shows interest</li> <li>• Teaches concepts</li> <li>• Models good speech and vocabulary</li> <li>• Holds child's attention on the task</li> <li>• Organizes child's thoughts about the activity</li> </ul>	<p>You're making a tower            You drew a square            You are dressing Mr. Potato Head            You put the girl inside the fire truck</p>
<p><b>ENTHUSIASM</b></p> <p>Enthusiasm means that you act happy and natural when you play with your child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lets your child know that you are enjoying the time you are spending together</li> <li>• Adds to the warmth of the play</li> <li>• Increases closeness between you and your child</li> </ul>	<p>Child: (carefully placing a blue Lego on a tower).            Parent: (gently touching the child's back) You are REALLY being gentle with the toys.</p>

## CDI Rules

DON'T	REASON	EXAMPLES
<p><b>COMMANDS</b>            Commands tell your child what to do</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Takes the lead away from child</li> <li>• Can cause conflict</li> </ul>	<p><u>Indirect Commands:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's play with the farm next.</li> <li>• Could you tell me what animal this is?</li> </ul> <p><u>Direct Commands:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Give me the pigs.</li> <li>• Please sit down next to me.</li> <li>• Look at this.</li> </ul>
<p><b>QUESTIONS</b>            Questions call for your child to give an answer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leads the conversation.</li> <li>• Many questions are commands and require an answer.</li> <li>• May seem like you aren't listening to your child or that you disagree.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We're building a tall tower, aren't we?</li> <li>• What sound does the cow make?</li> <li>• What are you building?</li> <li>• Do you want to play with the train?</li> <li>• You're putting the girl in the red car?</li> </ul>
<p><b>CRITICISM and SARCASM</b>            Criticism and sarcasm express disapproval of your child</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gives attention to negative behavior</li> <li>• Lowers your child's self-esteem</li> <li>• Causes angry feelings between you and your child</li> <li>• Teaches your child negative social behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That was really stupid</li> <li>• I don't like your attitude</li> <li>• Don't color the sky pink</li> <li>• Stop it</li> <li>• Your tower isn't straight enough</li> <li>• No sweetie, that's not where it goes</li> <li>• Can you do anything right?</li> </ul>
HANDLING PROBLEMS	REASON	EXAMPLES
<p><b>IGNORE MINOR MISBEHAVIOR</b>            Ignoring means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look away</li> <li>• Show no expression</li> <li>• Say nothing to child</li> </ul> <p>Catch first positive child behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps your child to notice the difference between your responses to good and bad behavior.</li> <li>• Although the ignored behavior may get worse at first, <u>consistent</u> ignoring reduces attention-seeking behavior</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child: (coloring carefully) My picture's better than your ugly picture.            Parent: (ignores rude talk) I like how carefully you're coloring.</li> <li>• Child: (crashing into parent's tower with toy plane) I crashed yours.            Parent: (turns away) My plane flies in circles.            Child: My plane goes high.            Parent: (facing child) Your plane is really high.</li> </ul>
<p><b>STOP PLAYTIME</b>            for aggressive and destructive behavior</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aggressive and destructive behaviors cannot be ignored because they can be dangerous</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child: (hits parent).            Parent: (gathering toys) Special time is over because you hit me.            Child: Oh, oh, oh Mom. I'm sorry. Please, I'll be good.            Parent: Special time is over today. We will play again tomorrow.</li> </ul>

# Asking Questions

## What to do when your child doesn't respond verbally to a question:

- Start with an open-ended question
  - Example: "What flavor of ice cream would you like?"
- If your child doesn't respond, rephrase the question as a forced choice question
  - Example: "Would you like chocolate or vanilla ice cream?"
- Avoid using yes or no questions
  - Example: "Would you like chocolate ice cream?"
- Always wait 5 seconds for your child to respond before asking another question. This will give your child time to process the question and respond.
- If your child responds with a gesture (i.e., shaking head, pointing), describe the behavior but do not interpret it's meaning.
  - Example: When you ask "Would you like chocolate or vanilla ice cream?" and the child points to the vanilla ice cream, you should say "I see that you're pointing with your finger. I need you to tell me with your voice if you would like chocolate or vanilla ice cream"

## What to do when your child does respond verbally to a question:

- When your child does respond verbally, reinforce the verbal response by:
  - Reflecting what your child said by repeating his/her answer back to him/her
  - and*
  - Praise the child's talking
    - Example: If your child answers "Vanilla" when you ask "Would you like chocolate or vanilla ice cream?" You can say "You want vanilla ice cream, great brave talking!"

### *Sample Yes/No Questions*

Do you want to play with these?

Do you like this color?

Can I do that too?

Is this the right one?

Does that look good right there?

Should I take a turn?

### *Sample Forced Choice Questions*

Do you want the red block or the blue one?

Should I be the Mommy or the friend?

Do you want the carrot or the pizza?

Should I be X's or O's?

Is this a square or a circle?

Should we play blocks next or Mr. Potato Head?

### *Sample Open Ended Questions*

What's a good name for this guy?

What should we play next?

What color should we use now?

What do you call this?

What shape is this called?

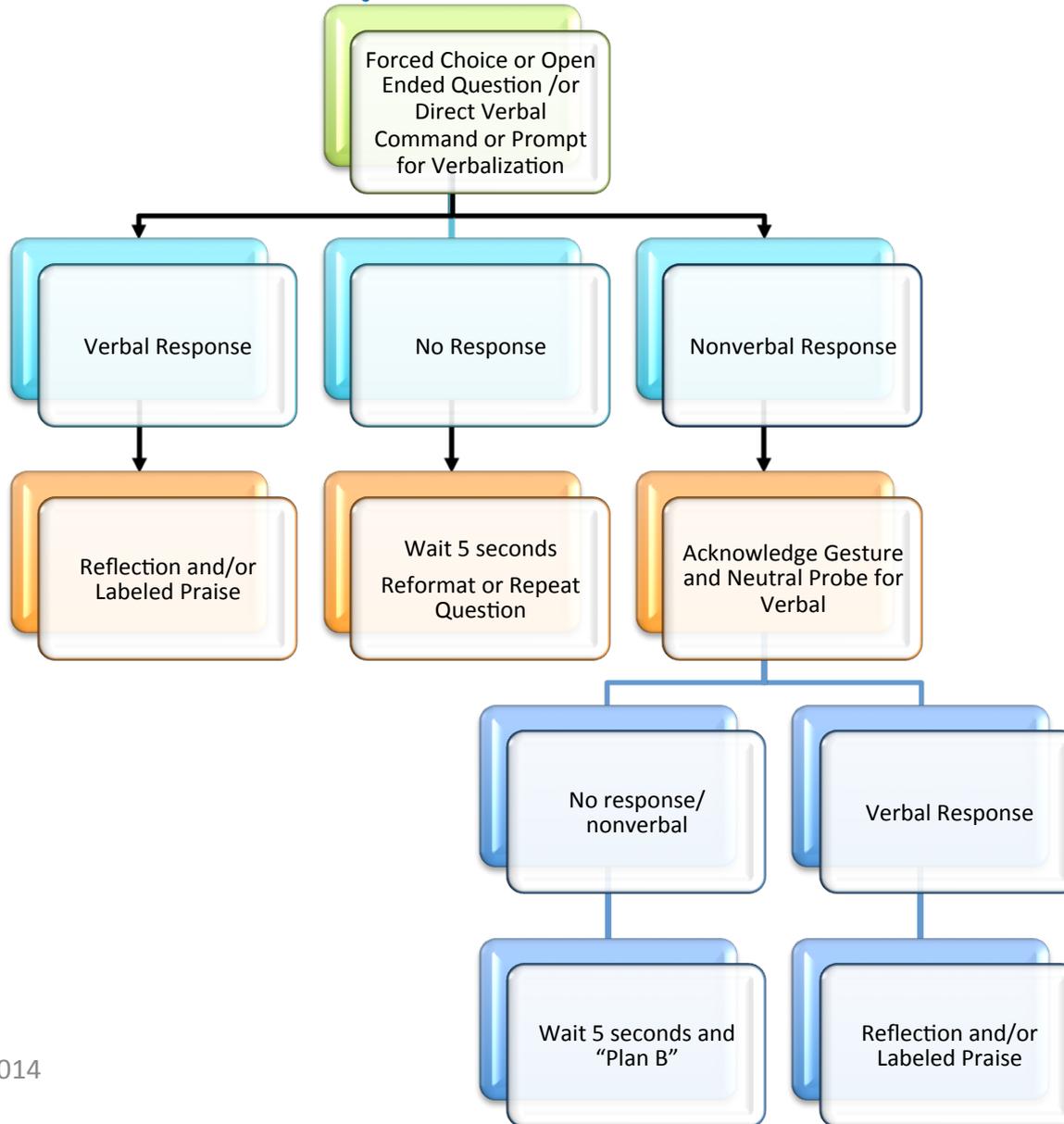
How many blocks am I holding?

## Selective Mutism Verbal Directed Interaction Sequences

**Rule:** Prompts for louder or full voice should be used depending on child's readiness

<p><b>When child answers right away:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Would you like to use crayons or markers to draw?" (forced-choice)</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5 seconds</li> <li>• Child: "Markers."</li> <li>• Adult: "Markers! (reflection) Great job telling me what you wanted to use! (Labeled praise)".</li> </ul>	<p><b>When child has difficulty choosing:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Do you want chocolate or vanilla ice cream?"</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5 seconds</li> <li>• Child: No response.</li> <li>• Adult: "chocolate or vanilla?"</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5 seconds</li> <li>• Child: No response.</li> <li>• Adult: "Do you want chocolate, yes or no?"</li> <li>• Child: Nods head.</li> <li>• Adult: "I see you nodding. Is that a yes or a no?"</li> <li>• Child: "...yes"</li> <li>• Adult: "Yes, you want chocolate". Good job telling me what you want!"</li> </ul>
<p><b>When child answers with a nonverbal response:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Would you like to use crayons or markers to draw?" (forced-choice)</li> <li>• Child: Immediately points to markers.</li> <li>• Adult: "I see you pointing (describing). Does that mean you want the markers or crayons?"</li> <li>• Child: "I want the markers."</li> <li>• Adult: "You want the markers (reflection)! Super job telling me what you wanted using your words! (Labeled Praise)".</li> </ul>	<p><b>When child answers with a barely audible response:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Do you want to watch Cinderella or Frozen?" (forced-choice)</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5 seconds</li> <li>• Child: Under breath "F..o..z.n"</li> <li>• Adult: "I hear you trying to answer (describing). I couldn't hear you. Say it again a little louder (direct command)."</li> <li>• Child: "Frozen!"</li> <li>• Adult: "You want to watch Frozen (reflection)! I love that you told me that with a loud voice (labeled praise)!"</li> </ul>
<p><b>When child answers in a whisper:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Do you want to eat your sandwich or your pretzels first?" (forced-choice)</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5 seconds</li> <li>• Child: Whispers "sandwich"</li> <li>• Adult: "I hear you whispering. Tell me what you want with your full voice. (Direct command)."</li> <li>• Child: "Sandwich" (full voice)</li> <li>• Adult: "You want to eat your sandwich first! (reflection) "Great Job using your full voice to tell me (labeled praise)!"</li> </ul>	<p><b>When child doesn't respond at all:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult: "Would you like cookies or crackers as a snack?" (forced-choice)</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5seconds</li> <li>• Child: No Response</li> <li>• Adult: "Crackers or cookies?"</li> <li>• Wait! 1            2            3            4            5seconds</li> <li>• Child: No Response</li> <li>• Adult: "Do you want cookies for snack, yes or no?"</li> <li>• Child: No response</li> <li>• Adult: "It might be hard to answer in front of all of these people, let's go practice in the hallway" OR "That might be hard to answer right now, think about it and I will come back and ask you in a little bit." OR "Go practice with mom and then come back and tell me."</li> </ul>

# Effective VDI Sequence



## Treating Selective Mutism: CDI & VDI

CDI & VDI skills	VDI Questions																				
<p><b>Labeled Praise:</b> a positive statement about what the child is doing in the moment.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white;">Adult</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Great job using your voice to answer my question!</td></tr> <tr><td>I like that you are playing with the toys so gently.</td></tr> <tr><td>Nice job sharing!</td></tr> <tr><td>I love that you looked at me while you told me that.</td></tr> <tr><td>It's fantastic that you stayed calm with me while mom left the room.</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Adult	Great job using your voice to answer my question!	I like that you are playing with the toys so gently.	Nice job sharing!	I love that you looked at me while you told me that.	It's fantastic that you stayed calm with me while mom left the room.	<p><b>Forced Choice:</b> is a question in which two or more possible responses are given within the question.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white;">Adult</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Is <i>pink</i> or <i>blue</i> your favorite color?</td></tr> <tr><td>Is this a <i>butterfly</i>, a <i>dog</i>, or a <i>cat</i>?</td></tr> <tr><td>Would you rather play on the <i>swings</i>, the <i>slide</i>, or <i>you don't know</i>?</td></tr> <tr><td>Do you want to see the movie <i>Frozen</i> or <i>another movie</i>?</td></tr> <tr><td>Did you brush your teeth: <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i>?</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Adult	Is <i>pink</i> or <i>blue</i> your favorite color?	Is this a <i>butterfly</i> , a <i>dog</i> , or a <i>cat</i> ?	Would you rather play on the <i>swings</i> , the <i>slide</i> , or <i>you don't know</i> ?	Do you want to see the movie <i>Frozen</i> or <i>another movie</i> ?	Did you brush your teeth: <i>yes</i> or <i>no</i> ?								
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# Adult Prompts

Situation	Yes/No	Forced Choice	Open-Ended	Non-question approach*	Direct Command - Verbal	Indirect Command - Verbal
<b>Ice cream</b>	We're having ice cream. Do you want some?	We're having ice cream. Do you want vanilla, chocolate, or something else?	We're having ice cream. What flavor ice cream do you want?	We're having ice cream. Show me which flavor you want.	We're having ice cream. Tell me which flavor you want.	We're having ice cream. Maybe you could tell me what flavor you want.
<b>Bathroom</b>	Do you need to use the bathroom?	Do you need to use the bathroom, or not?	What do you do if you need to use the bathroom?*	Here's the bathroom pass. Just give it to me if you need to use the toilet at any time.	Tell me whether you need to go to the bathroom or not.	Some of the kids are using the bathroom. You can tell me if you need to go or not.
<b>Morning Meeting</b>	Is today Monday?	Is today Sunday, Monday, or you're not sure?	What day is today?	Point to which day today is on the calendar.	Please tell me what day today is.	Here are the days on the calendar. Maybe you could tell me what today is.
<b>Prize store</b>	Do you know which prize you want?	Do you want the plane, the ball, or something else?	Which prize do you want to buy with your points?	Show me which prize you want with the points you earned.	Tell me which prize you want for your points today.	You earned so many points today. How about you tell me over here which prize you want for your points.

#	<b>Yes-No Question*</b> *Particularly <i>contraindicated</i> because of increased probability of the child “replying” with a nod or gesture and, therefore, missing opportunities to practice Brave Talking	<b>Forced Choice Question*</b> *Great for purposeful practice of Brave Talking or when you <i>do</i> need a reply for some reason.	<b>Open Ended Question*</b> *Great for purposeful practice of Brave Talking or when you <i>do</i> need a reply for some reason
1	Do you need to go to the bathroom?	Do you need to go or don't need to go, to the bathroom?	What do you do if you need to go to the bathroom?
2	Is this your backpack?	Is this your backpack or someone else's?	Whose backpack is this?
3	Can you tell me what shape this is?	Is this a square or a triangle?	What shape is this?
4	Are you having hot lunch today?		
5	Did you bring your completed book order?		
6	Do you know where your homework is?		
7	Do you know what to do next?		
8	Are you going home with Henry today?		
9	Did you want some more juice?		
10	Can I help you with that?		
11	Do you think the moose hibernates?		
12	Did you finish your math?		
13	Would you do the same thing if it were you in the story?		
14	Did you finish getting everyone's Favorites?		
15	Is that the right answer?		

#	<b>Yes-No Question*</b> <i>*Particularly contraindicated because of increased probability of the child "replying" with a nod or gesture and, therefore, missing opportunities to practice Brave Talking</i>	<b>Information (TA)*</b> <i>*Good for when you don't absolutely need or require a reply or action</i>	<b>Indirect Verbal Prompt (IC-V)*</b> <i>*Good when you don't absolutely need or require a reply</i>	<b>Direct Verbal Prompt (DC-V)*</b> <i>*Great for purposeful practice of Brave Talking or when you do need a reply for some reason</i>
1	Do you need to go to the bathroom?	The bathroom pass is there if you need it. You don't need to ask you can just take it.	Maybe you can tell me if you need to go to the bathroom.	Please tell me if you need to go to the bathroom or don't need to go.
2	Is this your backpack?	I think this is your backpack. I'll put it in your cubby.	Let me know whose backpack this is.	Please tell me whose backpack this is.
3	Can you tell me what shape this is?	This one has 3 sides. It's a triangle.	You can tell me what shape this one is.	Tell me what you think this shape is.
4	Are you having hot lunch today?			
5	Did you bring your completed book order?			
6	Do you know where your homework is?			
7	Do you know what to do next?			
8	Are you going home with Henry today?			
9	Did you want some more juice?			
10	Can I help you with that?			
11	Do you think the moose hibernates?			
12	Did you finish your math?			
13	Would you do the same thing if it were you in the story?			
14	Did you finish getting everyone's Favorites?			
15	Is that the right answer?			