**Episode 15 – Selective Mutism and a Child’s Explosive Tendencies**

Hello and welcome to the Selective Mutism HELP, Home Educational Learning Program, Podcast, my name is Kelly, and I will be your host. This podcast aims to give you the help you need to support the person in your life affected by Selective Mutism. In this episode I will be talking about some challenging behaviors that you may have noticed in your SM child. I’ll talk about one method that helped us understand where the unwanted behavior was coming from and how we stopped the explosiveness. Let’s get started.

Welcome to episode 15 of the Selective Mutism HELP Home Educational Learning Program podcast. My name is Kelly, and I am a parent of a child with Selective Mutism. Being that I am a parent and not a medical professional, this podcast is for informational purposes only. If your SM child is like ours you’ve probably heard your child’s teacher rave about how wonderful of a student they are – listens to instructions, doesn’t interrupt, is quiet in the hallways, etc. But then when your child comes home, it’s like a hurricane or tornado has blown through and they are the exact opposite of what the teachers described. You mention this behavior to the teachers and they look at you like you have 4 heads, they can’t comprehend that the sweet child at school can cause so much destruction at home.

Why is this happening? How can one child act so completely different at home versus at school? Let’s take a closer look at an SM child’s day. They wake up and immediately feel sick to their stomach because they know they need to go to school. They know they are going to be at a place where they won’t be able to speak all day. They may worry about what will happen if they get hurt and can’t tell anyone. They may worry about what will happen if the teacher calls on them and they won’t be able to answer. They may worry about what they will do if someone takes their lunch and they don’t have anything to eat. All this worry makes their stomach hurt which makes them not want to eat breakfast even though their parents are telling them they need to eat breakfast before they leave. They may take a little longer to pick out their clothes because some of their shirts have a tag that itches or if they wear a new shirt someone might comment on it so they just stare at the clothes unable to pick something out while their parent is trying to hustle them along. They want nothing more to please their parent, but their brain is so full of worry and fear that they can’t focus on what needs to happen.

Once they make it to school the anxiety is at its peak. There is so much noise, so much movement, so many demands, so many expectations. There are people staring at them waiting for a response from a question that was asked, there are kids asking them why they don’t talk. There are tests and presentations and group work. There is recess that is full of kids but no one to play with. There is lunch time but the knot in their stomach hasn’t gone away since breakfast so the thought of eating makes them feel worse. They may not have had an opportunity to use the bathroom yet because the teacher forgot to ask them and now they won’t be able to ask to go and they are worried they will have an accident. The constant thought of needing to go to the bathroom doesn’t leave room to concentrate on what the teacher is trying to teach them.

Finally they are home. They are at the place where they feel the safest. They can let their guard down. They are with the people they love the most and who love them no matter what. They’ve held it together all day. They did what their brain was telling them to do – don’t talk, don’t do anything that will bring attention to you. Now is their time to be real. The reality for them is they are tired. They are tired of being silent. They are tired of having a stomachache all day. They are hungry, so hungry. And what happens when you are tired and hungry? You explode at the slightest thing. A quick reminder for them to take their shoes off could be just enough to unleash the beast. You all know exactly what I’m talking about.

So what do we do as parents? How can be tame the beast? My husband and I had our “ah-ha” moment after we read the book The Explosive Child by Dr. Ross Greene. I highly, highly, highly recommend this book if you have a child with explosive tendencies. I’ll leave a link in the episode notes. While you are waiting for it to ship, I will tell you the highlights of the book. Basically, there are three types of parenting. Plan A is the authoritative type. You will do this, you will do that, why? Because I told you to. Honestly, this was us. This is probably the “easiest” type of parenting but the least effective. You can only yell and take things away so many times. And, if you think about it, has it really worked? If you are still yelling and taking things away, it isn’t working. It was definitely not working for us. Another parenting type is Plan C. This is basically the opposite of Plan A. You let everything slide in Plan C. They want to wear their shoes in the house? Sure, no problem! You want to eat cereal for every meal for the next three days? Sounds good! You’re right, the couch does look like the perfect trampoline, jump away! Now, just like Plan A, this isn’t really sustainable either. The child isn’t going to learn what is appropriate and respectful. So now lets find some middle ground, let’s talk about Plan B. This is where Dr. Greene’s Collaborative Problem Solving or CPS model comes in to play. This is an opportunity to find out from the child why they are struggling. You simply ask them, when they are in a calm state of mind, what’s going on. Hey, I noticed when you get home you don’t take your shoes off right away, what’s up with that? Now, I’m going to pause and tell you that when we started this model, it was super strange. Not only for us, but for our daughter. She was 5.5 at the time. When we would ask her questions like this she would say “I don’t know.” And that is expected and its ok. The model explains to simply say “That’s ok if you don’t know right now, think about it and we’ll talk about it later.” And you know what? We would talk about it later and our daughter would give us some great insight. It opens up a whole new concept that we sometimes forget about – just talking and listening. Taking out the judgement and how we think our child should act. Actually hearing from them why things are difficult and coming up with a plan together to make things easier. Just like the name implies – Collaborative Problem Solving.

Another part of the book is understanding that your child may have lagging skills and these may be contributing to their explosive tendencies. If they are lagging in a skill yet we are constantly pressuring them to perform that skill, yes they are likely to be more explosive. There is a great discussion guide Dr. Greene created called “Assessment of Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems” or the ALSUP. This has a whole list of lagging skills such as difficulty handling transitions, poor sense of time, difficulty maintaining focus, difficulty managing emotional response to frustration, and so many more. Then next to each lagging skill is an area where you can write down the Unsolved Problem which is the specific expectation the child is having difficulty meeting. This is specific and is free of adult theories. Here is an example from our ALSUP. Our unsolved problem with her having the lagging skill of not being able to handle transitions was that we needed her to stop playing and get ready for dinner. So we talked with her about it and came up with a plan – she needed a 5 minute warning for when dinner was going to be ready. Or we needed to have dinner be ready at the same time every day so she could look at the time and know how much time she had left to play. Another lagging skill she had was difficulty seeing the “grays” she was a very literal thinker, could only see in black and white. Therefore, the unsolved problem was she didn’t understand sarcasm. Whenever we used sarcasm she wouldn’t understand it and would therefore explode. To solve the problem, we needed to be more aware of this and not be so sarcastic!

This method is definitely a process and it takes some getting used to. This was just a very small explanation of this model. Again, if you want to learn more, make sure you pick up the book “The Explosive Child” by Dr. Ross Greene. If you want to see it in action from real parents going through this, join the Facebook Group “The B Team” which is a private group that has almost 74,000 members. It is very helpful in figuring out how you can use it to help lessen the amount of explosions that are erupting in your home.

Thank you for taking the time to listen and to open yourself up to a new parenting style. If you have any questions about this topic or questions about Selective Mutism, you can email me at smhelp2020@gmail.com, or send me a message through Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn. Take care.

Link for Dr. Ross Greene’s book “The Explosive Child” <https://amzn.to/3qHIP9V>