A GUIDE FROM THE PRACTICE OF SHARIFUL A. SYED, MD

My child won't talk to me: what to do right now

Silence is often not a choice. A child can freeze when there's too much to process, when they feel put on the spot, or when the words just won't come, even with a parent they love. Pushing harder usually makes the freeze stronger. These steps lower the pressure so talking feels possible again.

If anyone may be in danger, call 911. For the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, call or text 988.

Lower the pressure

- Talk side by side, not face to face: in the car, on a walk, while drawing or building something.
- Ask fewer questions. Try one, then wait ten full seconds before you say anything else.
- Offer choices instead of open questions: "Good day or hard day?" A thumbs up counts.
- Start with what they love. Their favorite game or topic is the easiest door in.
- Don't take the silence personally, and keep showing up. Being near, without asking for anything, builds trust.

Give them other ways to answer

- Texting, even from the next room.
- A notebook you pass back and forth.
- A 1-to-5 scale on the fridge: point to how today feels.
- Drawing what happened instead of saying it.

What to watch for

- A sudden change from how your child used to be.
- Losing words or skills they had before. Tell your child's doctor soon.
- Talking at home but not at school (or the other way around). That can be a sign of anxiety worth a professional look.
- Pulling away from everyone, not just you.

When to call a doctor

- The silence has lasted weeks, or it's spreading to school and friends.
- Your child has lost words or skills they used to have.
- Sleep, eating or mood have changed.
- Your child talks about feeling hopeless or not wanting to be here: call or text 988 now.

Talk with Dr. Syed for 30 minutes, free, by video or phone: **(516) 522-0410** or sharifulsyedmd.com/autism.

General education for families, not medical or legal advice and not a diagnosis. Every child is different; talk with your child's doctor about yours.