

Shyness In the School-Aged Child

We live in a culture that values social interaction and extroversion, but not everyone is wired this way. Some people, kids included, tend to hang back a bit more, and are a little more cautious by nature. Of course, there is nothing wrong with shyness, but parents can sometimes worry that being shy will lead to unhappiness or loneliness for their child, and having a shy or introverted child can seem especially challenging when you or your partner are more outgoing. But take heart – rest assured many shy or introverted kids go on to lead happy and fulfilling lives! There are things that you can do to help your child come out of his or her shell and make friends along the way.

All of us are born with a temperament, right from the time we arrive. Some babies are easy to settle and seem to be happy all the time, while some have a tough time dealing with changes in daily routine, or some seem to be sensitive to noises or lights. Well, as you might guess, the more sensitive and introverted babies are usually the ones who continue to be shy as they enter childhood. Our personalities and genetics are a big part of why we act the way we do, and this goes for kids as well. In fact, there are benefits to being more introverted – many introverts are thoughtful, sensitive to the emotions of others, and while they may have fewer friends in number, they often have deeper and more meaningful relationships with others. Many shy kids also have rich imaginations, which can lend itself well to curiosity and creativity.

That said, it is still important for your child to develop social skills. One way you can help your child is to allow him or her to ease into social interactions. Although it might be tempting to take a sink-or-swim approach, this doesn't tend to work well. In fact, it might actually backfire, and make your child even more fearful. It's also likely to decrease your child's confidence in his or her abilities, can reinforce any negative ideas that he or she may have, and, in the worst case, might impact his or her trust in you as a support. Instead, offer your child some life preservers – that is, things he or she can use to feel more comfortable. For example, if your child was nervous about going to a party, you might remind him or her that a friend from school will be there, or talk about the activities that will happen. It can also be very helpful to remind your child of other times in the past that he or she felt nervous, but actually ended up having a fun time.

You can also help by role modelling confidence and openness in your interactions with other people. You are your child's most important example of how to be in the world. Shy children sometimes see the world as a scary place, and if your actions reflect or reinforce this idea, it can be harder to undo. Interact with others in a confident way, and talk positively about your interactions afterwards. If making small talk or conversation is

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something that you also struggle with, consider reading books on the subject to brush up.

It also helps to think positive, and make sure to notice and reinforce your child when he or she goes outside of his or her comfort zone or tries something new. Praise your child and make a point to notice exactly what he or she did, for example, "Today your teacher mentioned that you asked Kaitlyn and Emma if you could play with them at recess. Great job! I know that must have taken courage to ask." It may take your child a few attempts to start feeling good about tackling a tough situation, so make sure your own frustration isn't visible. It is also harmful to shame or punish your child for feeling shy. Doing this will only reinforce negative thoughts and can harm your relationship.

Your child's teacher is another great resource when it comes to working on shyness. Chances are, if you take the time to ask, the teacher will be able to provide some suggestions and resources. Shyness is a common childhood concern, so the odds are good you won't be the first parent asking! Your child's teacher might also give you some insight and perspective into what situations seem to be hardest for your child, and what helps in different settings. The teacher may even share observations of times when your child seems more comfortable and outgoing, which can give you ideas to build on.

If you are worried that your child's shyness seems to limit their enjoyment of life, or if your child seems consistently down, listless, or sad, speak with your pediatrician as soon as you can. You can also contact the [mental health intake](#) in your region to discuss your concerns.

The majority of kids either outgrow their shyness, or learn to handle it, and this is where you as a parent can help. Keep in mind that a very shy child will probably still be at least somewhat more reserved throughout life. Loving and accepting your child for who he or she is, combined with support and encouragement to try new things will help your shy child grow into adulthood with a sense of confidence. The links below can offer you more information about helping your child work through shyness.

[Healthy Children: Shyness in Children](#) – If your school age child seems shy or is having a hard time making friends, this information from the American Academy of Pediatrics' site might be helpful for you.

[KidsHealth: How can I help my child overcome shyness?](#) – KidsHealth offers great tips for any parent helping their elementary school age child work through shyness.