

Shyness is very common in children. Think of how often a very young child is afraid of strangers. Perhaps a child hides when a service person comes to visit, or even during a visit from Uncle Charlie or Aunt Freda. On the other hand, a child may seem to be gregarious in his or her early years, but may develop shyness later on. Why is this?

It's often easier to make friends as a child. A child shares his toy truck in the sandbox, learns another child's name, and presto! He has made a friend. Children who live down the street are natural candidates for friendship. And the various social mores aren't as complicated when we are children. There is no Emily Post or big books of etiquette that must be read before going to the playground!

When we age, social interactions and conversation become more complex. It becomes handy to know a little about a lot of different things, so that one can talk intelligently about another's interests.

Activities become much more centered around conversation than on doing. Interactions are not so much "Let's go play on the swings" as they are about the latest cool movies, or video games, or pop culture. Plus, age differences can enter into the picture. A younger child may look up to and admire an older child, but may find it that much harder to make conversation because of the age difference.

Shyness doesn't matter as much during early childhood. There are always toys, books, and movies, and around adults, silence is often mistaken for good manners. But as one progresses through the school years, especially when one approaches high-school age, socializing becomes more and more important. There are dating, proms, and dances. So when a child seems to develop shyness later in childhood, is it really a matter of "becoming" shy? Or is it simply a matter of the world becoming complex faster than one can handle?

If you want to encourage your child to overcome some shyness, you should take things gradually. Don't try to force him or her into unfamiliar or scary situations. In fact, how you interact with your child yourself may be the most important thing.

Too many parents are too busy with their lives to worry about interacting with their children. But the first opportunity the child gets to socialize with people is with members of his or her own family.

In the early stages, the child may want constant attention. "Mommy, mommy, look at this!" However, as your child matures, he or she may actually need encouragement to "open up," and need practice in more complex social interactions.

Sometimes parents are too busy to listen to their children. If you see signs of shyness developing in your child, make sure that you do not contribute to the problem. Encourage your child to express himself. If he wants to tell you about his day, let him! Don't dismiss his conversation as childish prattle.



## Some other tips:

1. Don't interrupt. If your child is trying to express himself, don't cut him off. My own experience as a child with a family member was of being interrupted often. When I protested, the response was, "Oh, I knew what you were going to say anyway." If you don't give your child a chance to express his thoughts, who will?
2. Don't be patronizing. "That was very nice, Johnny." "What an interesting story, Judy." These comments may sound neutral, but sometimes they can mask a patronizing tone. Instead of pat responses to make your child feel as if you are interested, instead show real interest in what your child is saying. Try to draw your child out when he or she talks to you as you would with an adult. Ask leading questions which make your child want to say more. "And then what happened?" "And then what did she do?" Show your child you are genuinely interested in what he or she has to say.
3. Don't be too quick to correct your child. Some parents think it is their responsibility to take the opposite viewpoint or to play "devil's advocate" when their child tells them something. "She wasn't mean to you. That's just her way of playing." Or "Maybe you will be an astronaut when you grow up, but not very many people can do that." Watch yourself, and see how many times you disagree with or correct your child--not in matters of grammar or pronunciation, but in matters of pure personal opinion. Remember, just as there are two sides to every story, the same applies with you and your child.

Shyness can be a difficult problem for both the child and the parents, but a little careful thought can help minimize the difficulties.

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Tim Arends for over ten years has maintained the Internet Shyness FAQ, now at <http://www.shyFAQ.com>. Visitors to his site can obtain a FREE copy of his ebook, How To Remember People's Names; The Master Key to Success and Popularity. Tim also offers his complete overcoming shyness system at <http://www.shyfacts.com>.

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