

## Helping Your Shy Child

I have had a problem with shyness all my life. Therefore it's natural for me to want my children to be outgoing. I never want them to feel the way I used to when I was a kid. Being a kid is hard enough without feeling shy and insecure all the time! If you, like me, would like to help your children become less shy, here are some helpful do's and don'ts for you to consider.

### **DON'T:**

1. Don't force your child out of shyness. The harder you pull, the more your child will retreat. It is better to create a comfortable environment that lets her social personality develop naturally.
2. Never label your child "shy." On hearing this label, your child feels that something is wrong with him. He may feel even more withdrawn and shy as a result of negative labeling.
3. Don't put your child on the spot and require him to share talents or perform without warning. Performing in itself is hard, and the surprise places unnecessary pressure on your child.
4. Don't override your child. An extroverted care giver paired with a more reserved child sometimes makes it difficult for the child to get a word in. Listen to your child and don't interrupt! By becoming more reserved around your child, you may watch her become more communicative and open towards you.
5. Never laugh at your child unless they are telling a joke or trying to make you laugh.
6. Never put a child down for making a mistake. Putting him down makes him scared to make mistakes and hence try new things. Instead, explain that it's okay to make mistakes.

### **DO:**

1. Recognize that you are blessed with a sensitive, deeply caring, and cautious child. Hug your quiet child often and make him feel at ease. Create a gentle environment that he can let loose or relax in.
2. Keep direct attention off your shy child. As she becomes more comfortable in a setting, she will warm up and lose some of her reservations.
3. Prepare the child for things that will be expected of him. For example, if you want David to play the piano for Grandma, tell him before she arrives so he has time to prepare himself. Experts emphasize the importance of preparing a shy child for new experiences by talking about them, listening to the child's concerns, and giving the child as much information as possible.
4. Love shy children for who they are! Accept your child's personality. Your child's shyness may or may not dissipate over time, but you can't make the shyness disappear. Don't make a big deal. Give them extra attention when extra attention is needed.
5. When your child has something to say, stop what you are doing and give her your full attention. Listening helps the child to learn to communicate better.
6. Explain to the child that it's okay to be quiet, and that some of the world's most important people started off quiet.
7. Parents should rehearse communication techniques at home with their children. For example, the night before your child's show and tell day, you can ask your child to tell you what he's bringing and what he does with this particular object. Run through it and rehearse it so that your child will be more practiced when the actual event arrives. Being prepared can give your child the extra dose of confidence he often needs, particularly in situations that require addressing a group. In addition to helping your child practice communication skills for public speaking, you can also help him practice social communication skills. You can help your child develop a repertoire or set of topics that he can talk about in different situations. You could ask your child, "How do you go up to a kid at recess and start a conversation?" You can even use puppets: How would the monkey get to meet the giraffe? What would he say?
8. Help your child to practice affirmations, little positive statements that are repeated over and over to help gain belief in one's self. Some examples might be: everyone likes me, I have lots of friends, everyone listens to what I have to say, what

I have to say is important.

9. If you were shy, tell them some stories about your shyness.

10. Give your child lots of opportunities to interact with other children. Foster friendships by making your home open to other kids and by encouraging your child to bring friends home to play.

11. Help build your child's confidence. When a child has a positive experience, his confidence soars. Your child will have more positive experiences if you help him discover and develop his unique talents. If your child loves to paint, for example, try to provide him with the tools he needs, and consider enrolling him in an after-school art class. Be careful, though, to guide your child toward his own talents, not to force an activity on him that interests you. When you seek out a special class or other extracurricular activity, make sure it's one in which your child will be encouraged and praised, not singled out for criticism. Look for situations that are psychologically safe for the child: nurturing, enjoyable experiences through which the child can grow.

11. Give your child time. Don't expect her to come right out and talk and play with other children. Sometimes the best thing to do is to tell her it's ok to just sit and watch, then leave the child alone. No matter how a youngster comes by her bashfulness, she is likely to grow out of it eventually and to change her way of responding to new people and situations. The support and encouragement she gets from you will help her meet life's challenges as they arise.

**For further information try:**

The Shy Child; A Parent's Guide to Preventing and Overcoming Shyness from Infancy to Adulthood by Philip G. Zimbardo and Shirley L. Radl

The Shy Child: Helping Children Triumph over Shyness by Ward K. Swallow PHD

The Ugame by Talicor

-A game which players take turns answering questions from the cards they pick. Helps to overcome shyness by getting the person to talk about their feelings. It's rated for ages 6 to adult and is available online from Amazon.com. Customers have given it good reviews.

Web sites used for research:

[www.themestream.com](http://www.themestream.com)

[www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com)

[www.familyfunzone.com](http://www.familyfunzone.com)

[www.alternativeparenting.com](http://www.alternativeparenting.com)

[www.parentsplace.com](http://www.parentsplace.com)

[www.womeninfo.com](http://www.womeninfo.com)

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