

Helping Children Overcome Shyness

News

Parents write

What advice do you have about shyness? Our daughter struggles with this problem and we are unsure what to do about it.

Children's ability to comfortably relate to a wide variety of people is one of the most important ingredients to happiness and success. Those hindered by shyness face various hardships. Lost opportunities, social exclusion, damaged self-esteem, and loneliness rob children of life's fun and fulfillment. Concerned parents are often confused by and poorly equipped to help their child overcome these difficulties. If this sounds familiar, consider these coaching tips to help your child over the stumbling block of shyness:

Take note of the situations that reflect your child's "shyness signature"

Children are affected by shyness in different ways. Some kids will not answer the phone while others will not make calls. Spontaneous encounters can be particularly difficult since it requires the child to respond quickly and without preparation. Playing within a group are typically more troublesome than one-to-one pairings. These circumstances shape the barriers that your child's "shyness signature" builds around their life. Denial and defensiveness are also often part of that signature.

Respectfully approach your child about the issue, balancing concern and curiosity

Ask them if they have considered how shyness may be affecting them. Some kids are more comfortable with calling it "avoidance." Explain how social barriers get in everyone's way to some extent. Reveal your observation that they are missing out on some great opportunities in life and express your wish to help them "beat their shyness." See if they would be willing to list situations where they are free from shyness and where shyness still blocks them. Assist them in this activity with your own mental notes. This helps them view shyness as surmountable, and builds motivation to overcome it.

Explain how shyness barriers can be conquered through skills and drills

It's vital to instill confidence that shyness can be "beaten." Liken it to other personal victories of your child, such as riding a bike or improving their performance in certain areas. Craft a short empowering message that appeals to them. "Say goodbye to being shy," might work just fine. Next, provide brief conversational tools easy to memorize. These "auto-responses" are to be retrieved without delay. They include phrases such as "How are you?" "What's you been up to?" or "Glad we saw each other." Write down these and other expressions underneath the headings of adult, child, and friend. Link each expression to the heading according to situation and social convention.

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Prepare them to use phrases and conduct scheduled and surprise drills

Give your child a "heads up against shyness" by letting me know ahead of time when their skills are going to be needed. Suggest which relatives or family friends might be good people to practice with due to their laid-back personalities. Ask if they are willing to practice with parents. Offer typical scenarios in which one or both parents play roles, and have the child participate and observe. Stress how helpful surprise drills can be since they offer them a chance to become "inoculated" against shyness under controlled conditions. This drill entails an improvised approach by parents in which the child must spontaneously respond. Reinforce greetings, questioning, and commenting during drills to educate them about how to keep up "their end" of conversations.