

## **Information for Parents on How to Help their Children/Teens Overcome Shyness or Social Anxiety**

A bashful young child quite often becomes a timid teen, which makes it difficult when they are alone and facing new transitions in life. Shy children and teens do want to connect with others, but they just don't know how. Even mild shyness may lead to school phobia, social anxiety and emotional stress. Many times they are afraid to make the first move because they are worried about embarrassing themselves. They usually do not like attention drawn to them. Parents can unwittingly add to their teen's fear by chalking it up to being shy and dismissing their fears. If a parent notices their child not socializing with others and carrying themselves in a non-confident manner, it is time to sit with the child and discuss what is going on. Here are some starter examples –

I have noticed that you are not socializing that much at school (pause) is there something going on?

How do you feel when you are at school?

If you are put into a situation or place where you do not know anyone, how does that make you feel?

What ways do you try to connect with other kids?

What differences do you see in yourself from home to school?

(Whether they give you an answer or not, follow up with – Know that I am always here for you and if there is anything you ever want to talk about, please come talk to me. I love you and I want you to be happy and feel good about yourself.)

(And then a quick lesson in Counseling 101 – start out by having your child identify the problem, then ask what they have tried so far to resolve the problem, then ask what they now can do to try and change the situation and then set attainable goals for change)

TIPS –

- For a shy child, having at least one to two close friends is vital so **ENCOURAGE FRIENDSHIPS**
- Always assure him that taking emotional risks is necessary to gaining social skills and freeing himself from the limiting shyness. However, do not push him into situations that he perceives as unendurable
- Connecting with a child slightly younger can help a shy child because the slight age difference puts them in the leadership role and gives them the opportunity to practice social skills in a non-threatening relationship.
- Always make your home open for your child's friends. Children are much more comfortable on their home turf.
- Shy/timid children like to connect with others anonymously via online chat rooms, emails, texts, video games, etc. Limit the time your shy child spends with this type of faceless and voiceless communication. Encourage telephone conversations and face to face meetings with friends.
- Get them involved with volunteer work! They may not like it, but it will put them in a leadership role in a controlled environment. The focus of the self-conscious, shy

teen will be taken off themselves and placed upon helping others. A shy teen can blossom and learn how to connect and interact with others when the fear of not being the prettiest, the most athletic or the smartest is removed for the equation, and they feel the spotlight is off of them

- Direct your child's attention to his body language. Subliminal cues like voice volume, gait and posture convey a strong message to his environment. Show him how to talk more slowly and loudly, to make eye to eye contact, to lift his chest, to pull his shoulders down and back and to walk slower in order to convey a message of confidence.
- Shy children and teens have excellent imaginations. Advise your teen to use his mind power to envision positive social scenarios.
- Small talk is a great tool to lessen shyness. Embolden your child to talk to anyone he meets in daily life (For example – the postman, the waiter, a cashier) And PRAISE your child for speaking up (Never speak for your child – e.g., when ordering food at a restaurant)
- BUILD SELF-ESTEEM! Shy children may have negative self-images and feel that they will not be accepted. Reinforce shy children for demonstrating skills and encourage their autonomy. Praise them often!!!