

Say Goodbye to Being Shy

A Workbook to Help Kids
Overcome Shyness

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To Parents

Shyness is very common among children. More than one in three adults say that they were shy at some time during their childhood. Many parents think that their children will outgrow their shyness, but if your child has had noticeable periods of shyness for more than six months, then shyness has likely become a pattern of behavior, and this is definitely a pattern you will want to break.

It is not fun to be shy. I know this very well, because I was a shy child and teen myself. I didn't like to speak in class, I hated to meet new people, and I didn't have many friends because I was too shy to reach out to other children. I did not learn to overcome my shyness until I was in my mid-twenties. Even now, although many people would consider me an extrovert, I still feel like a shy person inside. I wouldn't wish this on anyone, and I'm sure you feel the same.

Most shy children show very early signs of anxiety and hypervigilance when they are very young—just a few months old. Scientists tell us that there is a gene for shyness, and that if children are born with this gene, their brains are wired to react with more anxiety and fear than children who do not have this gene.

The good news is that children can learn the emotional, social, and behavioral skills to overcome their genetic predisposition to shyness, and the earlier that they do this, the better. In fact, studies using standard tests of behavior and personality suggest that children who are taught skills to overcome their shyness at an early age cannot be distinguished from children who were never shy.

The activities in this book have been used by the authors to help countless children overcome their shyness. They will teach your child to self-calm and relax in the face of anxiety or fear, to master the basic skills of social interaction like making eye contact and smiling, and to change negative self-critical thoughts into positive ones.

All of the activities in the book will benefit your child—and may benefit you too if you are a shy person! However, some children may need extra help. There is a thin line where shyness crosses over into an anxiety disorder, and you should not hesitate to seek professional guidance if you feel that your child has crossed this line. If you feel that your child's shyness keeps him from normal, age-appropriate activities, such as joining a team or club, or going over to another kid's home for a play date, then you should certainly seek out a professional counselor. This workbook will still be of tremendous value as a way to reinforce the skills that your child is learning in counseling.

As you help your child, you will probably find out that it is difficult for him to talk about certain issues. Never force your child to talk if he doesn't want to. The best way to get children to open up is to be a good role model. Talk about your thoughts,

feelings, and experiences as they relate to each activity, stressing the positive ways that *you* cope with problems. Even if your child doesn't say a thing back, your words will have an impact on his behavior.

There is no wrong way to use this workbook to help your child, as long as you remain patient and respectful of your child's feelings. If your child is being seen by a counselor, make sure you share this workbook with the therapist. She may have some additional ideas on how best to use the activities.

Shyness can be a lifelong problem, but I know that this workbook can help prevent this from happening to your child. Your patience and understanding will make all the difference.

Sincerely,

Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Using *Say Goodbye to Being Shy*

Ten Tips for Parents and Counselors

- 1. Encourage practice.**

Remind children that the activities will be most beneficial when they are practiced on a regular basis. Reading this workbook will not change behavior; practicing will.
- 2. Encourage record keeping.**

Help children develop systems to track the times they practice new skills. Use charts or graphs to record their efforts. Keeping records will give children proof of their progress, which can be especially helpful when they are feeling discouraged.
- 3. Reinforce desired behavior.**

Using the system described in Activity 1: Your Reward List, record the points and provide the rewards children have earned. Use specific praise to reinforce behavior; instead of saying, "Good girl!" or "Good job," say, "You did a good job of ordering your own food just now."
- 4. Be a role model.**

Show children that adults also need to put forth effort to change their behavior. Think of your successes in overcoming problems or your struggles with new challenges, and share appropriate experiences with children.
- 5. Be a cheerleader.**

Provide gentle encouragement for children to try behaviors that they perceive as difficult, but avoid the temptation to overwhelm them with suggestions. State any advice briefly and in a positive way, for example, "That was a good response! Let's do it again, and this time, try making eye contact while you say it." Avoid criticism, and make it a personal rule to offer eight unconditional positive comments before making one suggestion for improvement.
- 6. Play a role.**

Assume the role of someone to whom children react with shyness, for example, a teacher that a child is having difficulty with. Enthusiastically role-play responses with the child, trying to provide a realistic experience by being like the actual person.
- 7. Provide dress rehearsals.**

To prepare children for a new experience, try a "dress rehearsal." Make practice realistic by changing your appearance and adding props, when possible. It will help if children can visit the actual location ahead of time. For example,

for children invited to a skating party, arrange a visit to the rink. Give them opportunities to rehearse some of the behaviors they would be likely to engage in at the party.

8. Ask questions.

Get children's answers to important questions such as these:

- What would help as you work on this new skill?
- What could I do that would help you the most?
- What could your teacher do that would make a difference?
- Who else can help?

9. Be patient.

Remember that developing self-confidence and assertiveness is a gradual, difficult task for children with a history of shy behaviors. Allow them to set the pace of progress. Through your words and behavior, demonstrate the kind of patience that you hope they will have with themselves.

10. Envision success.

In your mind, see children as self-assured and assertive. Imagine scenarios in which their shyness is gone and they are interacting in a relaxed, confident manner. As you develop this mental image, your attitude and body language will convey your belief to them in subtle but powerful ways. You will be seeing possibilities in them that they cannot see yet and creating the hope they need to become successful.

Note: The activities in the book follow a planned sequence. By completing the activities in order, children will be able to develop skills that facilitate the learning of subsequent behavior. Unless specific situations warrant doing some activities out of order, we suggest that the activities be completed in the sequence presented.

A Message to Young Readers

Hi! It is very exciting that you are going to say goodbye to being shy. The activities in this book have helped other people, and they will help you, too.

Shyness is a way of feeling afraid. This feeling can keep you from having a happy life. It can stop you from having fun with your family and friends and it can keep you from meeting new people. How can you get rid of this feeling that causes so much trouble? That's what this book is about. It is full of activities that will help you say goodbye to being shy. Lots of these activities are fun, and you will be able to try many new things.

Starting today, don't think of yourself as a shy person. Instead, think of yourself as a person who acts shy some of the time. Imagine how things will be when you are no longer shy. Picture yourself laughing and talking with other people, making new friends, and having fun. As you work on the activities in this book, imagine this often. It will make the shyness go away sooner. Before you know it, the good things you have been imagining will become true for you.

Each time you do one of the activities, you will get a little less shy. As you do more activities, you will become a lot less shy. And if you do many of the activities, you will say goodbye to being shy—and hello to more fun and more friends. As the shyness goes away, you will be able to start doing things you have never done before. Maybe you will sleep over at a friend's house for the first time or go to a birthday party or read for your class. As you become more confident, all of these things can be fun for you.

Many of the activities involve writing. It does not matter if you do the writing or if somebody else listens to your answers and writes them for you. The important part is that you think about the answers. Your answers should be written in the book, but it is okay if someone else writes them.

You will be asked to do different things, and if you do them in order, they might be a little hard (but not too hard). Take one step at a time, and you will be able to do them. Your parent or counselor can help, too.

It's time to get started!

Sincerely,

Richard Brozovich
Linda Chase

About This Activity

You will develop a list of rewards that provide an extra reason to work on activities. By using rewards from others to improve your performance, you can learn to work hard to achieve your goals.

Many times, people work hard because they enjoy what they are doing. It may make them feel good, or they may know that their hard work will pay off in the future. And sometimes, people work harder if they know that they will get a special reward when the work is finished.

For each activity you do in this book, you can earn reward points. The book suggests how many points you can earn for each activity. In this activity, you and your parent or counselor will make a list of rewards you can receive for earning those points. The rewards should be things you really want and things your parent is happy to give you. They should be special things you do not receive all the time. You and your parent will have to agree on how many points are needed for each reward on your list.

Here is a sample of a reward list completed by Bill and his dad. Remember, these are things Bill really wanted, and his dad was happy to give him. Your parent may not agree with some of these rewards, or you may not want some of the rewards Bill wants. You and your parent have to figure out a reward list just for you.

Reward	Points Required
Treat at ice cream shop	35
\$5 to spend at the hobby shop	90
Stay up an extra half-hour	20
Rent a movie or game of my choice	45
Thirty minutes playing games with Dad	45
New mountain bike	1400
Skip one day of chores	30

On the next page, you'll find space to make your own reward list. You can add to the list or change it at any time, but you and your parent must agree to the change.

*My Reward List***Reward****Points Required**

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Your parent's signature_____
Date_____
Your signature_____
Date

About This Activity

You will learn that most people act shy in some situations and that acting shy is a normal reaction. You will also find out that you can learn how to handle feeling shy by practicing what works for you.

Many famous people have felt and acted shy. One famous person who worked hard to become more self-confident is the former president of the United States, Jimmy Carter. President Carter had to be brave and strong to overcome feelings of shyness. It would have been easier for President Carter to stay at home on his farm, but he was determined not to let feelings of shyness control his life. You can be like President Carter. You can practice and work hard and achieve your own goal.

Sometimes, grownups forget how it feels to be a child who acts shy. Following are the words of two children who each remember a time when they felt shy and what they did about it. Here is what they said in their own words—their own spelling and punctuation, too!

My Shy Moments: Rachel (age 10)

I get shy when somebody asks me a question (someone I don't know too well, my stomach feels empty. I feel like I am floating away. I am so light. When that happens I count to ten take a deep breath think of an answer and say it in my mind and tell them my answer.

My Shy Moments: Elizabeth (age 9)

My river dance recital. How did I help myself? Breathe Count to 10—pretend everyone is in their underwear—and just do what you have to do! go out there and show those people what you are made of!

Both of these children had no problem thinking of times when they felt shy. Notice that each picked a different situation and had a different way of handling shy feelings. While almost half of all children describe themselves as feeling shy, each of them feels it in their own way. You will find that some ideas for handling your shy feelings work well for you, and others do not. The important thing is that you continue to try new ideas and practice those that work best for you.