

SHY/WITHDRAWN STUDENTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Have predictable and consistent routines. If the shy child knows what to expect, he/she will have a greater sense of control and be less apprehensive. It is important to lessen the degree of anxiety in the child.

Create a classroom environment that supports all students. Never make fun of or demean students.

Reinforce social interactions. Be specific. For example, “Linda, your comment about soccer in class today was a wonderful addition to the class discussion” instead of “Good job”. Do not pick apart students for being wrong on unclear, but reinforce their good behaviors.

Consider the child’s own thoughts, feelings, and perceptions, as they are important components of assessment and treatment of shyness. The child is the best authority on his own feelings, even if he has some trouble verbalizing those feelings.

Encourage discussion of daily activities and emotions involved with the activities. Discuss the shy child’s day over dinner or during play time.

If the child feels anxious around others, have the school psychologist or counselor teach different ways to relax in stressful situations, such as breathing techniques, muscle relaxation, or imagery.

Educate children about the topic of shyness through story books or other activities. Learning how others deal with shyness can serve as an example.

Social skills training with an extremely shy child/adolescent can help to improve conversational skills. The child can use these conversational skills during unstructured situations and/or around unfamiliar people. Areas to focus on include: initiating and sustaining conversations, making introductions, or asking for help. Teach students social “door openers” for initiating conversation with peers. (“Can I play too?”) Have students practice social interactions by rehearsing with role play, puppets, or stuffed animals.

Set goals and offer praise when they are reached. Make sure the goals are attainable, an example of a goal could be to raise their hand in class and contribute to the discussion.

Provide models of effective communication behavior using live demonstrations or videotape. Point out to students when good communication behaviors have occurred and why they are good behaviors. This can be done for all students without singling out a shy student.

Encourage a sense of humor in the children. Jokes are a possible way for children to interact and communicate, as long as they are not making fun of others.

Shy children have less developed social skills than their agemates. By providing them opportunities to play with or tutor younger children, their self-esteem and confidence will be boosted. This is a possible way to improve their social skills in a non-threatening manner. This is also an opportunity to capitalize on a shy student's strengths. If a shy student is strong in science, assign them as a peer or cross-age tutor.

Partner children up for activities in order to ensure that shy children will have partners. Many times a shy child will be picked last, providing them with a partner will help ease a child's fear of this circumstance.

Try to provide positive peer interactions with the use of a central toy or game, as opposed to smaller individual toys. When children are engaged in play with a large object, such as a rocking boat, there is less argumentation and more interaction between children.

Use very small social groups to allow for more peer interaction. Try to place the shy child with a warm, calm, and accepting peer in a cooperative activity. Also consider arranging classroom seats so that shy children are adjacent to friendlier, outgoing classmates.

Consider group activities where students have specific roles. For example, have each student in a group study a different paragraph, and then in groups have the students "teach" their classmates about their paragraph.

Involve shy students by asking for their advice concerning classroom activities. Also, give shy students specific roles that encourage social interaction, such as "messenger". Assign withdrawn or shy students tasks that will make them feel important, such as erasing the blackboard or passing out papers.

Use interest inventories to determine interests of shy students. Follow up by using some of their interests during conversations or learning activities.

Have students write papers in which they discuss their strengths and weaknesses as communicators. Do not ask them to read these or share them with peers.

Allow shy children to watch in order to warm up to a new situation.

Use a soft, invitational tone when calling on shy students in class. Only call on them when you believe they know the answer. Tell the class ahead of time what will be asked so that students have an opportunity to privately rehearse.

Encourage participation in social clubs and activities (e.g., scouts, sports, etc.).

Confer with parents regarding opportunities at home to increase social involvement with others (e.g., spending the night with a classmate, etc.). Also consult parents about

the student's interests or activities that might be useful for discussion or to draw them out in class.

Invite parents to volunteer in the classroom. Be aware, however, that a shy student's parents may also be shy. For some students, however, having a parent in the classroom may be a source of comfort.

Read books to the children about shyness as a form of bibliotherapy. Some suggestions for young children are Fiona's Bee by B. Keller and The Shy Little Girl by P. Krasikowsy.

Set realistic expectations, be supportive, and encouraging. Build a trusting relationship with the student by talking privately every day. If a shy student establishes a relationship with you, they may be more likely to participate. Get down on the child's level and make eye contact. Make time to take with them each day, and listen carefully and respond specifically to what they tell you.

Promote confidence by displaying the student's artwork or assignments for others to see.

While being sensitive to the needs of shy children, teachers should be careful not to reinforce shy behavior with special attention or privileges. (There is a natural tendency to want to be overly protective of shy children.)

Do not encourage dependence by doing too much for the child. Give him/her some responsibility. It is important not to reflect the idea that you do not think they are capable of doing things on their own.

Do not force the shy child to perform in front of his/her classmates, but encourage him/her to do so.

Refrain from labeling the child as "shy" when discussing behaviors with parents or other professionals when the student is present.

Be aware of warning signs that may indicate a more serious problem. Some warning signs to monitor: if the child never speaks, doesn't engage in routine school activities, doesn't eat lunch, doesn't use the restroom, complains of physical ailments, or appears overly anxious when spoken to. Contact the appropriate school personnel if a withdrawn or shy student continues to exhibit these traits despite classroom interventions.

Additional Resources:

Crozier, W. (2001). *Understanding shyness*. New York, NY: Palgrave.
Shyness: development, consolidation, & change. (2000). New York, NY: Routledge.

www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr267.shtml: How Teachers Can Help Shy

Students.

www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content3/shyk12.2.html: Working with Shy Children.

www.shykids.com

<http://www.apa.org/topics/topicshyness.html>

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