

# How Loved Ones, Friends and Mentors Can Help

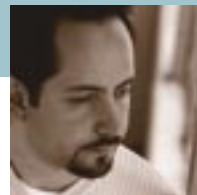


Psychological help is needed when a person frequently avoids or withdraws from social situations, experiences emotional discomfort, or is extremely concerned about evaluation or rejection.



## Maintain Appropriate Expectations

- Maintain appropriate expectations while communicating empathy for the shy person's painful emotions.
- Encourage them to tell you about their daily experiences and how they feel about them.
- Acknowledge the conflict between needs to belong and fears of rejection.
- Role play challenging situations with the shy person.
- Help the shy individual set specific, manageable behavioral goals, and agreed upon reasonable means to attain them.
- Help challenge the frequent negative thoughts about the self and others, and help them develop constructive alternatives.
- Avoid negative labels and intense pressures for social performance.
- Remember that shyness and social anxiety are common and universal experiences at all ages for most people.



" I asked her out and she said 'no'. I felt so rejected I never tried again, with anyone. That was 10 years ago."

## Give Specific Behavioral Feedback

- Tell the person exactly how the specific behaviors of avoidance, passive aggression, or inconsistency affect you, while communicating acceptance of the person.
- Ask permission for when and how best to offer constructive feedback (what might be done in the future to achieve favorable outcomes).
- Acknowledge the person's strengths and resources, while communicating your warmth and positive feelings toward them.
- Encourage the shy person to be more playful, physically looser, and to practice looking "foolish" while they try new things; do the same yourself. Lighten up, use humor.
- Arrange for shy children to play with, and mentor, younger children. Encourage group sports, acting and dancing classes in a supportive environment.



" He won't go outside and play with other kids."

## Change Yourself

- Challenge and counter maladaptive thoughts and negative emotional states that interfere with functioning, active exploration, and that lower your self-esteem.
- Set specific behavioral goals and practice desired actions in feared situations.
- Give yourself credit for taking social risks.

## Change the Situation

- Create cultures and group environments that work well for everyone, where all temperaments are acceptable. Encourage people to use their natural styles and forms of self expression. Enable all to participate, to share, listen, learn, explore, enjoy self-expression of thought and emotion.
- Collaborate in shared responsibilities with mutual group goals.

## Practice Social Fitness

- Adopt a health- or sports-oriented model. Being socially fit is like being physically fit. Exercise makes you fit and keeps you fit.



" I hide by asking lots of questions. If they know things about me they will judge me."

## A Psychologist Can Help

- Group therapy provides a place to explore, experiment, test pessimistic hypotheses about the self and social interaction, and develop adaptive interaction styles.
- Successful therapy lowers barriers to action and increases appropriate risk taking and self-acceptance. Deliberate social "niche picking", or choosing situations that suit one's temperament, also increases.
- Individual therapy provides a place to explore one's needs, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors without pressure from others.
- Group and Individual therapy help clients develop more empathy for others and themselves by reducing negative self-thoughts, self-blame and shame while building positive perspectives and effective behavioral patterns.
- Medication may help clients enter feared situations.



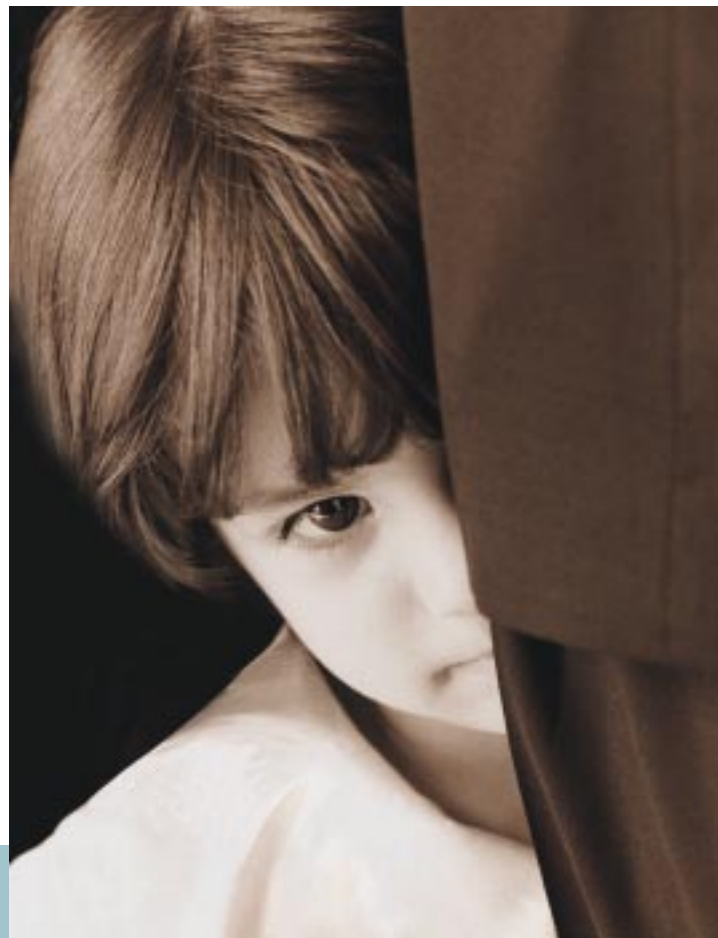
" It can hold you back from what you want in life. I don't want to pressure my daughter, but I want to spare her what I went through growing up."

All human beings are unique. They all have special needs that differ with age, family, cultural values and life experiences.

# TALK TO SOMEONE WHO CAN HELP

# PAINFUL SHYNESS

in Children and Adults



**“I want to be freed from this dark, silent prison of shyness, to share in the joys of living.”**

Talk to Someone  
**WHO CAN HELP**

Talk to Someone  
Who Can Help  
Talk to a Psychologist

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## Avoidance or Inhibition Creates Problems for the Painfully Shy and for Those Around Them

#### Avoidance and inhibition include:

- Canceling social events at the last moment
- Avoiding situations that provide positive social interaction
- Few or no friends
- Avoidance of activities that are otherwise pleasurable
- Passivity, pessimism and low self-esteem
- Friends, family members, teachers, or mentors are concerned
- Excessive computer use that is not social in nature, and is without face to face contact with others

#### Research shows that causes of avoidance, inhibition, distress can include:

##### Temperament or Biological Influences

- Withdrawn, avoidant, excessively emotionally reactive
- Highly sensitive, when lacking adequate social support
- Poor emotional “fit” with family members or some environments

##### Stressful Life Events

- Shaming experiences
- Major moves from one school or city to another
- Abrupt changes or disruptions in family life

##### Negative Family Interactions

- Frequent parental criticism and shaming to enforce behavioral compliance, high parental control with little expressed warmth
- Chaotic family interactions or neglect

##### Stressful Work or School Environments

- Highly competitive, critical, or hostile environments
- Public embarrassment for poor performance
- Dominance behaviors rewarded, and bullying or teasing ignored or encouraged



Talk to Someone  
**WHO CAN HELP**

#### Other signs of painful shyness may include...

- Blaming oneself when things go wrong
- Mild chronic low mood, easily embarrassed, low energy
- Failure to initiate social contact
- Frequent sadness, loneliness or resentment
- Use of alcohol or drugs to reduce social anxiety
- Written work at school exceeds class participation
- Excessive time spent on academic work or solitary professional activity to the exclusion of social interaction
- Little to no expression of anger, sometimes punctuated by angry outbursts