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## Encouraging shy children to break out

Parenting shy kids  
 Laura Willard

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Children each have unique personalities. Some are little social butterflies, making friends easily and having many. Others are quiet and more reserved, slow to warm up and preferring one or two close playmates. Charlotte Reznick, PhD, an educational psychologist, associate professor at UCLA, and author of *The Power of Your Child's Imagination: How to Transform Stress and Anxiety into Joy and Success*, offers some great advice for parents who are concerned that their child may be too shy.



### shyness isn't abnormal

The most important thing to realize is that, absent a traumatic event that might lead to withdrawn behavior, most children who are shy just have quiet temperaments; there is nothing "wrong" with them! Some children are simply shy, and as they get older, they break out of their shells on their own.

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*Shy children are usually very in touch with their own feelings and self-reflective. They are oftentimes good writers, and interested in psychology and philosophy as they get older. Encourage them to write out their thoughts and feelings from a young age.*

### Be Positive

Reznick cautions parents against saying to children, "Don't be so shy!" Even telling other adults that your child is shy in front of her can be harmful. Labeling children can make them feel as though they need to fulfill the label.

Instead, Reznick suggests being positive. "Children have the answers," she says, "and as parents or caretakers, it's our job to help them find those answers." One way to do this is by positively reminding your child of her past successes. For example, before a birthday party, ask, "Do you remember last month, when you went to Suzie's party, and you played with the other kids and had such a great time? Do you think you want to do that again today?" Discuss the scenario with your little one and encourage her with positive reinforcement.

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### Use imagery

Reznick notes that if you ask a child why she's shy, she'll usually give the standard answer: "I dunno!" If you instead use imagery and ask your child questions, you can make progress. For example, suggest to your little one that she close her eyes and visualize. Create a scenario and ask how it makes her feel. If she feels fear or worry, have her envision bravery and confidence. Have her imagine those feelings taking over her body. As abstract as that can sound to an adult, it can really help a child.

Remember that being shy is generally not a problem for children who are in elementary school or younger. Reznick explains, "Some children are outgoing and have a lot of friends; others are more timid and are happy with one or two close playmates." If your child is unhappy about his shyness, then there is certainly cause to work with him. And if your little one seems to be more than just shy and is exhibiting signs of social anxiety -- which can cause physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches and inability to sleep -- professional assistance may be warranted.

Otherwise, work positively with your child as much as you feel will be beneficial. Use your parental instincts. Nobody knows your child like you.

Help your child become less shy and more confident >>

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Laura Willard is a law school graduate who uses her hard earned education to change diapers, sing the ABC's, and play referee to adorable two toddlers. Along with her husband, she is the parent to her two year old son from Vietnam and her one year old daughter from Ethiopia. She is a Southern California-based part time freelance writer who is passionate about adoption education and ethics and who loves anything and everything related to chocolate, wine, and the beach.

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