

Understanding shyness in every stage of life

[Psychology](#), [Child Development](#)



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Introduction

The American Psychological Association defined shyness as the tendency to feel awkward, worried or tense during social encounters, especially with unfamiliar people. Severely shy people may have physical symptoms like blushing, sweating, a pounding heart or upset stomach; negative feelings about themselves; worries about how others view them; and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions (“ Shyness,” 2017). Shyness can be experienced by anyone from all ages, from infancy, childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. It can happen to all stages of human life. Infants may cry when a stranger smiles at them, toddlers will grab their parent’s leg when someone they did not know approaches them, and some students are anxious in school. From dreadful interviews for jobseekers, to feelings of lower-esteem for retirees, in all stages of human life, shyness is inevitable. If

shyness is not overcome in early stage of life, it could negatively affect each succeeding stage from childhood, to adolescence, and to adulthood.

The Causes of Shyness

Before knowing the effects of shyness it is very important to know the cause of shyness especially in early stage of life. Many studies were conducted to prove the true cause of shyness, whether it is genetic or learned behavior. Parents play an important role in honing the behavior of their children; their parenting style has a big impact on their children's way of reacting or doing things. The nurture issue of human development wherein environmental influences can determine the kind of person one would become plays a big role. For example, parents who are over-controlling, although their intentions are good, may shield their children from stressful life situations, thus prohibiting their ability to develop coping skills and self-regulation ("Parenting Styles Influences," 2013). In addition, the amount of warmth exhibited by parents to their children is also linked with childhood shyness. Studies suggest that children who receive praise and warmth experience less anxiety, stress and loneliness than children who receive little parental warmth ("Parenting Styles Influences," 2013).

Parents can become a contributory factor to childhood shyness; they are often concerned about avoiding putting their shy kids in situations that are uncomfortable for them. Overprotecting kids sometimes cannot be beneficial for them; they miss experiences that they should go through that will teach them those important skills in life such as social skills. If parents become overprotective, children miss opportunities to practice regulating feelings of

shyness (Weir, 2014). It is very important for children to learn how to cope up with situations they are dreaded to, but how can they learn if they don't experience it because their parents protected them (Weir, 2014).

Moving on, some researchers claim that genetics is another factor of shyness; new research from the Child Development Laboratory at the University of Maryland suggested that being shy is caused by interactions between genes and the environment. It shows that shyness in kids could relate to the manner in which a stress-related gene in children interacts with being raised by stressed-out parents. In this case mothers' behavior towards their children during stress and the children's serotonin gene are reacting to one another. In this research, they have studied how stress from mothers affect children who have a stress-sensitive variant of a serotonin-related gene (two short alleles of this serotonin gene). The study concluded that those children who have a stress-sensitive variant of a serotonin-related gene are particularly likely to appear shy while growing up when they also are raised by mothers with high levels of stress; they came up with this conclusion by comparing it to a group children who have short alleles of serotonin gene but were living with unstressed mothers ("Shyness, Genetics, and Parents," 2007). In today's world, there are so many studies that are being conducted to better our understanding about the cause of shyness, and another one is this: scientists have discovered a gene that has something to do with shyness in children as well as introversion in adults; the gene is called RGS2 (Hitti, 2008). In the research conducted about this, the brain scans of the participants with variation in their RGS2 showed increased activities in the amygdala and insula: the two parts of the brain

that are linked to fear and anxiety. By knowing the gene RGS2, it helps in detecting people whose shyness can turn into anxiety disorder. Shyness and introversion are risk factors for anxiety disorders, especially social anxiety disorder (Hitti, 2008).

Another factor to consider as cause of shyness is life experiences. Each person's experience is different, and this experience will somehow affect how one lives and deals with other people. In a personal story, Jaypee, who got scolded by his grandparent suddenly became aloof and shy to all his family members. Ever since he got scolded by his grandfather he no longer attended dinner and other important gatherings in his grandparent's house. This scenario links life experiences to shyness. Some people have encountered circumstances that have led them to become shy, how they reacted to that particular situation can shape their subsequent reactions to similar situations. For example, if people who are shy approach new things little by little, it can help them become more confident and comfortable. But if they feel pushed into situations they don't feel prepared for, or if they are teased or bullied, it can make them even shyer (Lyness, 2016).

Early Age

Now that the different causes were discussed, the effects of shyness in different human life stages can now be clearly examined, starting with the effects of shyness to infancy. As shyness is a normal part of growing up, all babies show natural aloofness towards unfamiliar people around them. At an early age they are capable of recognizing different faces and most of the time they would only be comfortable with faces they know such as their

parents and other family members. Each child has its own unique way to interact with the world, one child may be more confident and comfortable interacting with other people and some children are not. It is very important for a parent to know the personality of their child; parents should be resilient and patient enough to adjust to their child's way of growing up. Knowing different methods to handle shy moments plays a major role in helping them to be comfortable in exploring the world. For example, a parent should give their baby time to feel comfortable. They should not make a child go straight into the arms of a less familiar adult; instead, they should encourage the adult to play with a toy near the child and use a calm voice ("Shyness and Children"). By doing this, the baby will be given a time to adjust in the new situation. Small actions like this would then help a child to handle situation properly, which would then help a child become confident and not shy. In addition, parents should avoid labeling their child as 'shy' because it makes the child feel there's something wrong about being shy; by labeling, it is confirmation that there's nothing the parent can do about their child's shyness ("Shyness and Children"). It is also very important to praise 'brave' behavior like responding to others, using eye contact, or playing away from parents, but be specific about what the child has done - for example a parent could say, 'Noah, I liked the way you said hello to the boy in the park. Did you notice how he smiled when you did that?' ("Shyness and Children"). A parent should show love and care to the child, but not to the extent that they may over-comfort the child which could send an impression that new situations are scary situations. Moreover, with regards to secure attachment and insecure attachment during infancy up to toddlerhood, these could also

become a major contributory factor on how children behave and socialize (Haiman, 2012). A toddler who experienced a secure attachment will likely to become an independent; they are better able to explore on their own, meaning they are not afraid (Haiman, 2012). Also, they are more curious and interested in exploring the world around them. On the other hand, insecurely attached infants and toddlers are often inhibited and withdrawn (Haiman, 2012). The take home lesson is to have a secured attachment to the child, beginning from the time they are an infant. This helps the kid feel loved and satisfied, thus the kid feels secure, happy, and confident (Haiman, 2012).

Going to School

Time will then come that a child needs to attend school or start in preschool. Many children have different feelings about this: some are excited and some are anxious. Obviously a shy child would prefer to stay home and be away from this overwhelming situation. Parents should know how to react properly when a shy child behaves in circumstances like this. Just like anyone's first time in any situation there is this feeling of anxiety and parents should explain it to the child that it is normal. When it comes to the dreaded first day of classes and the child did not participate much in school, an explanation to the kid should be made like "being quiet in class during the first days is okay because it's the first day." But always remember that it is an obligation of the parent to motivate the child; explain to the child that he/she will adjust one day, will soon have friends and everything will be fine. There are many ways to help your child in situations like this, one of which is having a good relationship with the teacher. Let the child see that the parent has a friendly relationship with the teacher. This is very important because it

shows that the child can trust the teacher (Rauch, 2015). In this stage of life, it is very important for parents to be hands on with their child. This is the stage where bullying in school starts, especially for young shy kids. They are vulnerable to bullying. Thus, parents need to always have time to communicate to their child about what is going on in school. Having a great conversation with kids about school on a daily basis will help build a rapport between parents and their children, by having this rapport everything that happens in school will be discussed spontaneously, even without asking them asking about it.

Teenagers

Moving on to teenage life, shyness for some people comes with them as they move to another stage of life. A child who has always been shy may struggle a bit more at this stage. During teenage years, naturally quiet and shy kids can become more anxious about participating in new activities and making new friends, or anything that would make them the topic of the crowd or spotlight (Krueger, 2017). They feel as though everyone is watching them, which makes them so conscious of their actions and appearance. Moreover, some teenagers may suddenly become withdrawn; if it happens they are going through a period called “hibernation.” This is the period where teenagers would rather just stay in their room and hide (Krueger, 2017). This may be a brief period for others and for some it may take longer since every child has different personalities. During this stage, parents need to reassure them that they are always available for their child. This is the time where support from family is needed to be shown and felt. This is why it very important to have time for children especially in their younger years,

because those moments being spent together would create a no secret environment between parents and their children, and so at this point if there any problems in school especially bullying, then teenagers can just openly share it to their parents. Today, bullying is very rampant and most of the time, victims are shy teenagers. It is very saddening to know that in some case, it leads to suicide. Although teenage life is an exciting part of human development, in this stage of life, there are so many new sorts of adventures to try which would then lead to building memories and experiences. But being shy keeps teens from making these memories, from participating in activities they are interested in, from making friends and exploring new adventures. Some teenagers are having fun with sports, dancing, singing or other activities with friends. Some teenagers are deprived of doing such activities due to shyness (" Shyness in Teenagers," 2016). Their suffering from childhood continued into their teen years and often into adulthood (" Shyness in Teenagers," 2016). Parents may still continue to intervene because it is never too late. Parents should encourage their teens to come out of their shell just a bit while there is still time. Since shy teens often become victims of so many criticisms because of how they are different from other teens; they are being teased and through this situations, their esteem level is lower than average (" Shyness in Teenagers," 2016). Parents should do something about it, start in the family setting such as letting the teenager speak or tell how their day been during dinner time. Parents should ask open-ended questions that will require them to answer not just by saying yes or no (" Shyness in Teenagers," 2016). Another good idea to do is to plan on doing a project, a hobby/ activity that involves other teens preferably teens

from different schools (“ Shyness in Teenagers,” 2016). By doing this, they are given an opportunity to try new ideas and hopefully they can see the message that their parents believe that they fit in and they can have fun.

Adulthood

Shyness of people in their teenage years could have a huge impact on their adult life if shyness wasn't overcome in the earlier stage of their life, so it will haunt them up to adulthood. According to the study of Researchers Levi Baker and James K. McNulty, shyness contributes to marriage problems among newlyweds, leading to an overall lower marital quality. They found out that people who are shy had issues with trust, jealousy, money, and household management (“ Shyness Negatively Affects...,” 2010) Moreover, prior shyness was also linked to communication problems in marriage because shy people had difficulty entering social relationships before. In the end, they feel social anxiety in the relationship, making them less confident in dealing with problems of married life. In a personal interview, a nurse stated that based on the experiences she saw with many people: “ due to lack of confidence, some people who are in a relationship tend to become very jealous and paranoid when their partner goes to a business trip or even during regular workdays” (Agcaoili, 2017).

Shyness not only affects relationships, it also affects one's career. Being shy may damage one's career; it has a negative impact on someone's profession (Mckay). Many would agree about this, in the beginning of their careers during interviews for the jobs, shy people might not present themselves well on the interview. Also, a shy type person won't be good enough at

networking and won't be bold enough when it comes to pursuing new opportunities (Mckay). According to the article written by Mckay, "researchers have found that people who are shy tend to begin their careers later than those who are not. They do this to try gaining more confidence." Also, they said that a shy person more likely end up refusing promotions compare to more outgoing type of person and in the end they ended up doing job that are less interpersonal (Mckay). Shyness hinders someone's potential to become a great leader. Moving on to ways on how to overcome shyness in this stage of life, a study says aerobic exercises such as running, biking, swimming, or brisk walking for twenty to forty minutes can reduce social anxiety and lead to a positive increase in mood (" Painfully Shy"). Aerobic exercise does not only help in a purely physical standpoint but also in psychological perspective. This is very effective way to boost shy people's confidence by reducing tension and alleviating nervous suffering (" Painfully Shy"). Although the effects only last for several hours after the workout, it would still be a great help for shy people because in the long run getting in shape would greatly affect their confidence. When a person feels good about himself/herself, that person can definitely show confidence when dealing with other people. In relation to lifespan, scientists have found out that shyness shortens lifespan (" Shyness Shortens Life Span," 2003). The conclusions come from experiments on rats, although the subjects are rats, researchers believe that similar physiological processes affect humans if the same process would be conducted. Researchers found that rats they identified as ' neophobic' (frightened of new things) had a 60 percent greater chance of dying at any given time than their confident counterparts. These

rats also produced more stress hormones during the experiment when exposed to an unfamiliar situation. Although there may be issue on how the researchers found which among the rats are neophobic and neophilic, one is for sure, people who are always afraid tend to have a negative outlook in life and having this outlook in life is associated with weaker immune system leading to a shorter lifespan.

Elderly People

Shyness can still be experienced even among elderly. The social roles of the elderly have fewer effects on other people, so shyness may have fewer consequences as people grow older (“ Shyness - Trait Shyness”). Also, the evaluations of others are no longer as important to the elderly so shyness becomes less dramatic. In this stage of life the reason for shyness has something to do with greater life disruption as a result of retirement, widowhood, and other changes toward the end of the life cycle. There is a way big difference in comparison to childhood shyness. In some extreme cases, due to being shy in their younger years, they tend not to be able to find partner in life/spouse in their younger years, thus they were not be able to create their own family. Then this people will live all by themselves through the years. Although, some may have friends, their friends could not fully help them in times of sickness or in the latter stage of their lives. One report estimated that as many as two million of the nine million Americans over the age of 65 who live alone and they have no one to turn to for help (Levine, 2010).

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