

Understanding in a
new social setting is



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Understanding the Distress of Children Who Suffer from Shyness Almost everyone has felt shy at some point in his or her life. Feeling uncomfortable or anxious in a new social setting is not uncommon or something to be overly concerned about; however, there are many people whose lives suffer because of their shyness. Shyness can have many harmful effects on a persons emotional and social well being (Bruch, 1999). Even though research on shyness has mainly focused on adults, shyness can be just as difficult, if not more difficult, for children. Because social and emotional development are so important during the school years as children are meeting and interacting with their peers, we see it as very important for teachers to be in tune with these types of developmental needs.

Childrens literature is a great way to bring up and discuss emotional and social issues. We found some wonderful childrens books that teachers can use in the classroom to discuss shyness, how it affects people, and how to make others feel better who are shy. If you have ever known a truly shy child, you probably know how difficult being shy can be for that child. It can be very painful to see a shy child desperately wanting to be accepted by other children yet not knowing what to do to gain their approval, or else too frightened to take the risk of trying to reach out to them (Zimbardo, 1981, p. 4). A woman expresses difficulty with having been a shy child: Growing up is painful at best, but excruciating for the shy. When others could not understand the reason for my lack of zest for life, I knew all along that my shyness was the real problem.

I was terribly envious of anyone who seemed comfortable with people. Anyone who could express their thoughts verbally . . . (Zimbardo, 1981, p.

4). A child who is suffering from this much pain needs to be of concern. Anything that makes a child unhappy, such as being unpopular, not feeling comfortable around peers, and not being able to communicate thoughts or feelings directly, is hazardous to a persons psychological well being (Kemple, 1995). Unfortunately children who suffer from shyness frequently go unnoticed by teachers and parents. Shy children are usually well behaved, quiet, and follow the rules they are supposed to (Zimbardo, 1981). Teachers may mistake a shy child as a content child, when in reality a child could be suffering within.

This is why it is so important for teachers and parents to realize the pain many children hold in due to their shyness. After looking at the research, we found that there are three main reasons people are shy. The first, and what seems to be the most difficult for children, is shyness due to low self-esteem. In this type of shyness people are shy because they dont like themselves and therefore think that others couldnt possibly like them either. The second type of shyness is caused from having been teased and the fear that it will happen again.

People with this type of shyness are often concerned about one particular trait of theirs or are only shy in specific situations. The last is that some people are just naturally quiet, so they seem shy when people try to talk to them. This type of shyness is not considered harmful compared to the other two since quiet people are not necessarily keeping themselves from doing things that they would like to do. We were able to find childrens literature books that address each of these types of shyness.

The one children's book we found that we feel fully addresses the distresses that shyness can cause is *Lets Talk About Being Shy*, by Marianne Johnston. *Lets Talk About Being Shy* is an informational book for children on shyness. We were particularly impressed with this book as it discusses the wide range of shyness and matches a lot of what the research states about shyness in children at a level children can understand and relate to. The main issues this book addresses are: what is shyness, when people feel shy, why certain people are shy, when caution is good, when shyness is