

Tips for Supporting Young Introverts

Adapted by Global Learning Partners from Susan Cain's *Quiet* p345-347

1. **Don't just accept a child for who she is; treasure her.** As long as they're in settings that suit them, introverted children can be kind, thoughtful, focused, and very interesting company. Talk to her teacher(s), friends' parents, grandparents and other adults in her life to brainstorm how to best do this.
2. **If a child is reluctant to try new things or meet new people, expose him to new experiences gradually.** Don't let him opt out, but do respect his limits, even when they seem extreme. When he takes social risks, let him know that you admire his efforts: "I saw you go up to those new kids yesterday. I know that can be difficult, and I'm proud of you." when he ends up enjoying things he thought he wouldn't like or that he was initially scared of, point that out to him. Eventually he'll learn to self-regulate his feelings or wariness.
3. **If a child is shy, don't let her hear you call her that.** She'll start to experience her nervousness as a fixed trait rather than as an emotion she can learn to control. She also knows full well that "shy" is usually a criticism in our society. When others call her shy in front of her (and they will), reframe it lightly, saying things like, "Sophie likes to take her time to suss out new situations."
4. **If a child is "highly sensitive" – meaning sensitive to lights, sounds, emotional experiences, or new situations, - then she might be what's known as an "orchid child".** This term derives from a groundbreaking theory now being investigated by research psychologists. It holds that many children are like dandelions, able to thrive in just about any environment while others are more like orchids. They wilt easily, but given a nurturing environment, they actually do better than dandelion children. They're often healthier, have better grades, and enjoy stronger relationships.
5. **Introverted kids usually have the capacity to develop great passions.** Be alert to your child's enthusiasm and cultivate them. Intense engagement in an activity is a proven route to happiness, and a well-developed talent is a great source of confidence. Traditional childhood activities such as soccer and piano may work well for some kids, but don't forget to look off the beaten path. You may be surprised to learn what excites your child and has them devoting hours of time each day.
6. **Accept if your child only wants to invite one child over at a time or for special events.** Although you want to challenge your child to experiment with different social settings and experiences. However, there are also times when your child should feel free to choose what is more comfortable. This may mean just have his best friend over for his birthday party.
7. **If you're an introvert, try not to project your own history onto your child and children around you.** Your introversion may have caused you pain when you were younger. Don't assume that this will be the case for your child, or that he won't be able to handle the occasional sling or arrow. He can handle it, and he can thrive. The best thing you can do for him is take joy in his wonderful qualities, have confidence that those qualities will carry him far, and teach him the skills he needs to handle the challenging aspects of his nature.
8. **Teach children to self-advocate.** The better children understand themselves and their preferences, the better they can explain their needs to others.