



## SHYNESS EXPERT: Back to School Advice for Parents and Teachers of Children Who are Shy

by Laurie Adelman

*With back to school just around the corner, every child experiences a certain amount of apprehension – but for children who are shy, anticipation of the first day of school can leave them particularly nervous and concerned about fitting in. Here are some tips from shyness expert Laurie Adelman that parents and teachers can use to put shy children on a positive track for a successful school year.*

As a nurse, health educator, shyness coach, and author of *Don't Call Me Shy*, Laurie Adelman has studied shyness all her life. The Don't Call Me Shy method is a step-by-step approach in which adults interact with shy children in a way that encourages the development of each shy child's full social potential. Having interviewed thousands of shy children, shy adults, parents, and teachers she has come to learn that unless we change the way a shy child sees him or herself we will not be able to change behavior.

NEVER LABEL A CHILD AS SHY. The way that a parent or teacher labels a child is the same way that the child will come to label herself. Label her shy and that is how she will view herself. Once a child develops a concept of herself as being shy she will behave in a manner that is consistent with that label.

- When you label a child as shy you convey to her the message that you don't believe she can behave in a socially skilled manner – and that is precisely the way she will continue to develop.
- When you change your view of a child from shy to potentially social, then your child's expectations become focused on what she can do. Always remember that shy means "I believe I cannot." Potentially social means "I believe I can."

DESCRIBE BEHAVIOR. Shy children need help defining who they are and what they are capable of. In order for them to see themselves realistically and in a positive way, it is important that the adults in their lives describe their behavior – without labels.

- It is very reassuring to a shy child to have a parent or teacher say "you need time to get used to a new situation, and that's okay. When you are ready you will sit with the other children."

SHY CHILDREN NEED TO EXPERIENCE SOCIAL SUCCESS. A shy child must experience social success in order to come to believe that they can behave in a social manner. It has been customary for shy children to be instructed to "get out there and try and act social." The truth of the matter is that they can't. The shy child knows what he or she should do but because she believes deep down that she is shy, she will be unable to do so.

- When parents and teachers create opportunities for a shy child to succeed, this gives the child the confidence to try again. If we want a child to feel that she is capable of social success we must put her in situations that she can experience social success.
- When you are first beginning to work to improve a shy child's social skills and confidence, a social success could include smiling at another child, sitting at a table with another child, or handing a crayon to a fellow student. A child must begin small in order to build confidence to continue to make more and more social attempts.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS. Begin to focus on what your child can do. When you see your child carrying out any positive social gesture, however small, take note of it. This new way of looking at your child will naturally occur when you begin to see her as potentially social, and stop focusing on the ways that she is shy.

QUIET REINFORCEMENT. Following any positive social gesture, at the first private opportunity, quietly reinforce your child. Let your child know how proud you were of the fact that she walked into the classroom all by herself and tell her how proud she should feel that she said hello to the teacher. When recognized with positive attention, these seemingly small social gestures go a long way to show the shy child that behaving in a social manner is not only possible – but it can be enjoyable and less pressure-filled than she may have previously thought.

When parents and teachers are given the proper tools to help shy children, amazing behavioral changes can take place. It is as though the child blossoms with new personality traits, but the fact is that these wonderful characteristics have always been there - just waiting to come out!

*Laurie Adelman, B.S.N., M.S. Family Health/Health Education, is passionately devoted to teaching parents and teachers how to interact with shy children in a way that brings out a child's social best. As a shy child herself and the mother of an ex-shy child, she understands how it feels to be shy and how challenging it can be to parent such a child. Adelman has written numerous educational and inspirational articles, newsletters, and medical abstracts.*

***Don't Call Me Shy*** is the only book that changes the mind-set of the shy child from "I can't" to "I CAN." Visit [www.dontcallmeshy.com](http://www.dontcallmeshy.com) for more information and support. You can order ***Don't Call Me Shy*** by calling this number: 1-800-864-1648.