

Visit With The Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists

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Helping Shy Children Build Relationships

"My daughter is very shy. Grades are fine but I know how important social skills are to be truly successful. What do you suggest?"

There are basically two types of shy kids: those who lack social skills and those do not use them. A way to find out which type is your child is to simply ask what they would do in a social situation. For example, if you ask, "What would you do if want to get to know a classmate playing by him/herself?" and the answer is, "I don't know," or, "Wait and hope they come over," then you know to focus on skills. If that is your child, you should be very direct and specific in teaching what to do, or even better, various ways from which to choose. Next, practice through role playing. Finally, ask for, and definitely watch for, even weak or clumsy attempts and reinforce heavily.

If, on the other hand, the answer to what your child would do to get to know a classmate is a description of an appropriate skill followed by, "But, I'm too shy to do that," or, "But, I'm fine by myself," or, "But, who would want me as a friend," or "But, I've tried everything and nothing works," then the solution is more complex. Simply disagreeing e.g., "Lots of people would want you as a friend," is far from

sufficient. In fact, disagreeing with your child's "but" simply indicates your lack of empathy, from your child's perspective.

No simple answer here since there are so many different possible reasons why any given child is shy. Sticking with a social task in spite of it being difficult is certainly a life lesson even we adults continue to learn! If you feel you need help getting your child through a particularly tough social time, group counseling can be quite effective and much less costly than individual counseling. In a group, kids can learn and practice skills and also work on self-esteem issues that may be the foundation for the "but" of their excuse for not being as successful as you know they can be.

It's a tough act to keep social expectations high along with praise for reaching goals, at the same time protecting fragile egos. There may be excellent reasons for shyness but not for avoiding doing what you can to help your child overcome it. So, we congratulate you! Helping your child develop socially is a vital to preparing today for success tomorrow.

Please ask! For more information and great websites to help with education challenges, visit the Total Learning Center website: www.TotalLearningCenter.com or call (724) 940-1090 for a free copy of a TLC CD full of useful information for parents.

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