



## HOW TO SUPPORT A SHY OR ANXIOUS CHILD

**Shyness is common among young children, marked by feelings of discomfort, self-consciousness, nervousness, and bashfulness when facing social situations and new experiences.**

Factors like temperament, past experiences, and environmental influences contribute to shyness. Babies may show signs of shyness as early as eight months, such as hiding their head against a parent's legs or resisting new experiences.

It is normal to feel shy; we all have experienced it during our lives, but when it starts causing anxiety, that is when it becomes a problem. Anxiety can bring on overwhelming emotions like fear, stress, and embarrassment, leading to physical symptoms such as stomach aches and shakiness.

These symptoms can really affect a child's social life and friendships, which can impact their happiness and well-being.

Understanding and supporting your little one's shyness can help them develop confidence and social skills, helping them to navigate the world with greater ease and resilience.



## DO

**Nurture your bond:** A positive relationship with your little one creates a foundation of confidence, comfort, and security for future interactions.

**Celebrate their uniqueness:** Embrace and celebrate your child's individuality, skills, and personality traits. Recognising their unique talents will boost their self-esteem and confidence.

**Spot Triggers:** Pay attention to your child's cues to identify situations that cause anxiety and work together to find ways to avoid or reduce these triggers.

**Stay Patient:** Overcoming shyness takes time, so offer understanding and patience as your little one navigates their emotions.

**Listen and Validate:** Get down to their level, listen carefully to your little one's worries, and validate their feelings, reassuring them that it is okay to feel anxious.

**Label emotions:** Encourage your little ones to name their emotions daily so as they grow, they become aware of what they are feeling, making it easier to manage that emotion.

**Encourage Independence:** Support your child in taking small steps towards independence, fostering their confidence and self-esteem.

**Share Your Stories:** Share with your child when you feel nervous or anxious to empathise with their feelings. Give examples of situations that made you nervous and what you did to overcome them.

**Positive Self-Talk:** Encourage your child to focus on positive self-talk and self-affirmation. For example, say things like, "I can do this," "I am brave," or "I am strong." "I can't do this YET!"

**Relaxation Techniques:** Introduce relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing and gentle stretching, to your child. Explain that they can use these techniques whenever they feel anxious.

## DON'T

**Label your Child:** Labels strongly influence how children see themselves and behave, so it is important to avoid them. Don't label your child shy, and don't let others label them, either.

**Make Comparisons:** Every child is unique and develops at their own time and pace. Avoid comparing your little one to other children who may be more outgoing.

**Force It:** Avoid pressuring your little one into social situations before they are ready. Respect their pace and allow them to gradually adapt to new environments and experiences.

**Mollycoddle Them:** While support is essential, avoid overprotecting your child from social interactions. Encourage gradual exposure to new experiences while providing guidance and reassurance.

**For more tips, tricks, hacks and advice on how to raise happy, confident children visit the [BBC Children in Need website](#).**

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