

4 Tips to Help a Shy Teen Make High School Friends



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5 min read

I can't think of anything that presents a shy teen with a greater challenge than starting high school and the stress of making new friends. This stress is felt by many teens. According to findings of the study [“Shyness Versus Social Phobia in U.S. Youth,”](#) published in the journal *Pediatrics*, nearly half of teens identify themselves as shy. Shy or not, all teens have a natural desire to have friends their own age.

Bryan and Kari noticed their son Jacob becoming more distant and agitated as summer was winding down and his first school day as a high school freshman drew near. Jacob spent more time than usual by himself in his bedroom playing games on his iPad. His attention seemed to drift when his parents were talking to him. He'd snap at his younger sister more than usual.

Bryan and Kari knew Jacob well enough to recognize that he was stressed about something. Fourteen-year-old boys sometimes don't know how to put their feelings into words. Patiently, they prodded him to open up and talk about it. Eventually, he broke into tears and said, "I don't know how to make friends."

Jacob was shy. He'd had two good friends in middle school. One moved away after eighth grade. The one that remained was spending more time with his new girlfriend than with Jacob. With some help from his parents, who took time to listen, Jacob admitted that his shyness around new people made him afraid he'd be lonely, or as he put it, "left out."

Teen girls struggle with shyness, too. Like Jacob, Britt felt so anxious about meeting new kids on her first day at a new middle school, she felt nauseated. Her parents had moved to a new school district where she knew no one. Planning for Britt to start high school, her mother drove her and a friend on their the first school day as freshmen, encouraged them to spend their lunch break together, and suggested they find at least one other person to join them at their lunch table.

I was a shy teen who had to learn to overcome shyness on my own. But like the parents of Jacob and Britt, parents can step in and offer help to their shy teens when they're struggling with the challenge of meeting new kids and making friends in high school.

There's almost a 50 percent chance your child is shy. If they are, open up a discussion. Ask your teen how they see their shyness affecting their life in the new school year. If they admit that they're struggling, here are some things you can do to help:

1. See the World through Their Eyes

When your teen admits to shyness as a problem, don't brush it off as "not a big deal" or label it as defect. Shyness is part of a set of personality traits that

often go together. For example, shy children tend to be better self-controlled, better listeners, more conscientious, more focused, and more creative than children who are more outgoing socially.

Many shy children become strong leaders as adults or succeed in other areas, not in spite of their shyness, but by channeling their shyness and related traits as strengths. The “Shyness Hall of Fame” includes such notables as former President Thomas Jefferson, actor Tom Hanks, and popular singer Carrie Underwood.

Don't hurry to give advice. Understand the problem first.

Patiently encourage your teen to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Ask questions to get clarity. Repeat back to them in your own words what you understand.

2. Build Confidence Using Role Play

Once you and your teen agree that you understand the problem he or she is having with shyness, work together to imagine some social scenarios likely to occur at school. These scenarios might include meeting students who share adjacent lockers, meeting students seated nearby in a classroom, or finding someone to eat lunch with.

Using the scenarios you and your teen choose, help your teen develop a few conversation starters. Conversation starters that seem obvious to you, might not seem obvious to your teen. If your teen is introverted, he or she probably isn't a natural at small-talk. Start with the basics, like how to talk through introductions and move into simple questions your teen can ask and respond to.

Then do some role play with your teen, taking turns on the roles. This means spend half the time with you role-playing your teen, and your teen role-playing a student they just met. Work with your teen on body language, too.

Have fun with different body positions, gestures and facial expressions and discuss what impressions they make on others.

3. Create Opportunities for Socialization

Keep up to date with your teen's social life by asking him or her to tell you how it's going. Once your teen connects with at least one new person at school, work with your teen to plan a social activity around a common interest. The activity could be an outing to a local attraction, or an invitation to a fun activity at your home.

Repeat this as your teen makes new connections, encouraging your teen to expand the size of the group invited to each activity as he or she makes new connections at school. As your teen gains confidence in their social ability, they'll start to initiate activity plans on their own.

4. Work with a Counselor

For some people, shyness can become a major obstacle to making friends. Some people experience so much anxiety in social situations. They freeze up, panic, or suffer from uncomfortable physical symptoms.

If your teen's anxiety about social situations causes them to miss classes, avoid using school restrooms, or suffer physically, talk with a counselor or psychologist who specializes in working with adolescents. Your child's high school may have a counselor or psychologist on staff that you can talk with.

An effective counselor or psychologist can help a teen learn how to be more comfortable in social situations, overcome anxiety, build confidence, and learn how to form new friendships.

What tips do you have for parents to help their shy teens make friends? Leave your suggestions in a comment below. And if you found this post helpful, please share it with your friends on social media.

A version of this post also appeared on LifeZette.com

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