

**CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT
STRATEGIES**

**RESPONDING TO
THE SHY CHILD**

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RESPONDING TO THE SHY CHILD

- The shy child is anything but a discipline problem. In fact, he is just the opposite. While many of his classmates work hard to get attention, sometimes in disruptive ways, he works equally hard to avoid it. Fearful of drawing attention to himself, he prefers to blend into the background. More spectator than participant, he tends to hang back rather than dive in.
- His shyness may be misinterpreted by peers. They may see him as unfriendly and conclude that he doesn't want to play with them. In reality, the shy child usually wants to be involved with his classmates but may not know how to begin or sustain a conversation.
- Teachers may also misread the shy child. They may mistake his reluctance to participate for lack of understanding. They may conclude he is academically slow and avoid calling on him in class on the assumption that he does not know the answer. In other cases, the teacher may conclude that the shy child is a serious, well-behaved student who warrants little attention. While it is true that a shy child is often a diligent student, he often needs the teacher's attention to give him the confidence to take risks in school and draw him out.

RESPONDING TO THE SHY CHILD

What Can You Do?

1. Place a shy student near the front of the room. In this way, he may be more willing to speak up in class because he will be less aware of the rest of the students. And by being closer to you, you can talk with him more easily. Also place students next to him who are likely to befriend him.

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What Can You Do?

2. Build rapport with the student. The more successful you are in developing a trusting relationship with him, the more likely he will develop the confidence to reach out to peers. Find some time to do some activities with him that he enjoys, perhaps letting him teach you a game or skill that he does well. Respond to him in an especially warm and nurturing manner and make sure to praise his accomplishments.

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What Can You Do?

3. Talk with the student privately. Shy children may need practice speaking with individuals on a one-to-one basis. Even a few conversations with him every week can improve his comfort and skill in interacting with others. Ask him about his interests or his activities and use these as the basis for your conversations.

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What Can You Do?

4. Teach the student some basic social skills. Entering social situations may be especially difficult if he does not know the right words to use. If so, take him aside and teach him some “door openers” (for example, “Do you want to be my partner?”). If he is receptive, try role-playing with him. Impress upon him the importance of smiling and maintaining eye contact. In addition, give him some ideas of what he can talk about with peers.

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What Can You Do?

5. Put on your social director's hat. The shy child most likely wants to be involved with his classmates but staying to himself is often the less painful option. If he is socially isolated, orchestrate some interactions with his peers. You might organize an activity for a group of students, including the shy child. Or you might ask a couple of friendly and mature students to ask him to join them at their lunch table. If you have students pair up in class, assign him a kind and easygoing partner. You may also want to encourage the student's parents to arrange social contacts with classmates, perhaps suggesting potential playmates.

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What Can You Do?

6. Give the student a little push. You may need to nudge him to do activities that require verbal interaction even if they are mildly anxiety-provoking for him as long as you are confident he can do them successfully. As one example, you might have him serve as the class messenger, which requires talking with school staff. Find something about his performance to praise.

- Adapted from:

Shore, K. (2020, September 17). *Responding to the Shy Child*. Ken Shore.

<http://drkennethshore.nprinc.com/for-teachers/>