

# SHYNESS IN YOUNG CHILDREN



## WHAT IS SHYNESS?

Shyness is a constant tendency to avoid or withdraw from others in social situations. There are many types of shyness and shyness looks different at different ages. In young children, there are at least two types of shyness: fearful shyness and self-conscious shyness.

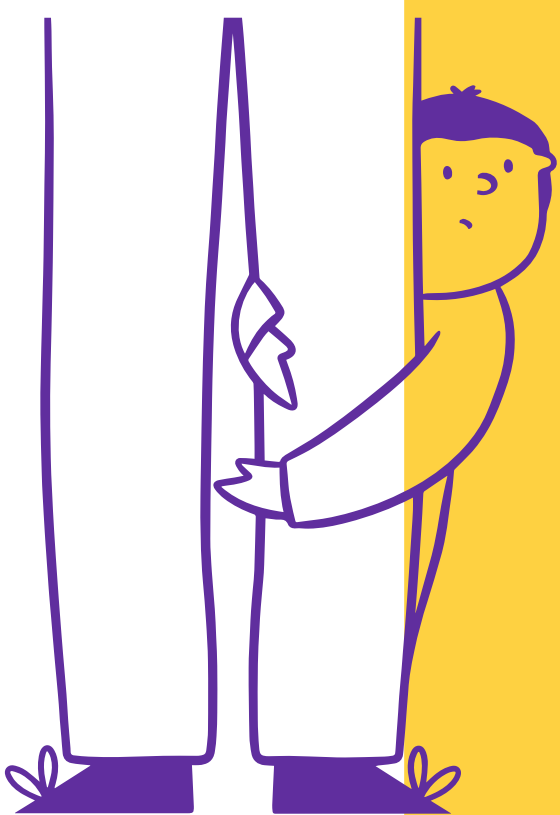
### 1 FEARFUL SHYNESS

Fearful shyness usually develops during the first 3 years of life. In new social situations, like meeting someone for the first time, fearfully shy children may freeze, pull back, or want to escape. This is usually because the child wants to protect themselves and to feel safe. For babies, fearful shyness is called behavioural inhibition and can happen in both social and non-social situations.



### 2 SELF-CONSCIOUS SHYNESS

Self-conscious shyness usually develops after 4 years. This type of shyness happens when children are at the centre of attention and feel exposed, like when talking in front of the class. In response, they may blush, have a quicker heart rate, and feel embarrassed. As children grow older, they will interact more with the world outside of their homes and become more conscious of their social self, and care more about how other people see them.

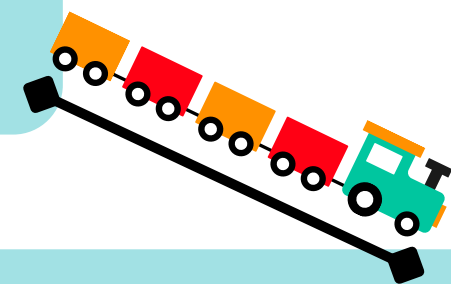


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## IS SHYNESS A CONCERN?

If you perceive your young child to be shy, you don't have to feel too concerned. Shyness in young children is normal, and every child's development is different. Some children take longer to warm up to others and most children will either grow out of their shyness or learn to cope with it in their later years. Gender and culture can also make a difference.



### Gender and Culture

In some cultures, parents and teachers are more likely to accept or reward shyness in young girls, and discourage or look down on shyness in young boys. The same is true for peers around the child's age. Other children may exclude or reject shy boys but accept shy girls. This can make it more difficult for shy boys to learn how to cope with their shyness and learn social skills.

Parents should take the time to think about how they respond to shyness in their children and how that might impact them. For example, if a child's parents think they should be loud and outspoken they may feel insecure and that they are not meeting their parent's expectations. The culture surrounding a child can have a great impact on the way they think about themselves and how they act.

Children are also influenced by the environment outside of their homes. Children need to learn to have a sense of self, independent from their parents. Shyness can become a concern if it is a reason for social exclusion or bullying. Children may find it hard to adjust to spaces like school or social activities. Missing out on these social interactions can hold back the child's social skills.

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## WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

1

**Babies show emotion from birth through their cries, facial expressions, and posture.** It is important to be sensitive to your child's cues and moods from infancy. Babies that show strong negative emotions like anger and sadness might need more tending to than others. Being a trustworthy source of support and comfort in the early years creates a secure bond with the baby. Children will have the courage to explore their surroundings on their own with a sense of safety.



2

**Encourage toddlers to take part in social activities** like playdates or extracurriculars like sports and Scouts. You can also coach your child before presentations and social gatherings so they feel more prepared and less anxious.

**Allow them to explore on their own, and be attentive depending on the situation.** If they are not in distress, too much attention may actually encourage shy behaviour. Instead, praise brave behaviours like eye contact and playing with other kids. However, if your child is showing signs of being distressed – becoming frustrated, moody, or crying – it is okay to give them more attention and comfort. This is especially the case for children who have difficulty managing their emotional responses.



3

**Be supportive and respectful of your child's independence.** Avoid being too protective or trying to manage everything your child does. This will only make them feel like they can't do things on their own. Instead, encourage them to make their own decisions and talk them through why certain decisions may not be the best ones.



**Shyness is normal and not a bad thing.** Parents should be careful not to negatively label their children as shy. Be supportive and patient. Sharing your personal experiences with shyness can help your child understand themselves better.

Every child's development is different; if you have a concern, speak to your doctor or child health nurse. You can also call the Ngala Parenting Line Metro 08 9368 9368 or Regional 1800 111 546, or visit [raisingchildren.net.au](http://raisingchildren.net.au)