

A gentle method for overcoming shyness; Lessons from a reformed introvert...

Shyness is a common complaint, especially among school-age children. But adults can also be shy and find their shyness to be a frustrating barrier to living life to the fullest. Being shy can affect your whole life... including your business life. I too was boxed into this category until, by necessity, I stepped out of it. So much so that I wrote a best-selling book called *Giving Candy To Strangers* which will teach you how to overcome shyness.

You might believe that you were born shy, and there is some science to suggest that shyness is partially hereditary. However, you can learn to be less shy and to enjoy your life more. You weren't born able to walk, talk, or ride a bike, but you still learned. You can learn to be more socially comfortable, too.

Try these strategies to come out of your social shell and enjoy the company of others:

- 1. *Imagine yourself being more social. The things you imagine vividly are indistinguishable from real experiences as far as your brain is concerned.***
 - Spend some time each day imagining yourself confidently and successfully navigating a variety of social situations that you would like to handle well in real life.
- 2. *Use systematic desensitization. Start small. Very small. Walk around your local mall and do your best to make eye contact with the people walking toward you. If that's too intimidating, walk around with your head up, eyes forward, and walk confidently. Slowly ramp up the level of interaction from there.***
 - Make it a point to smile and say, "Hi" to one person. On the next trip, say "Hi" to three people.
 - Ask someone for directions to a store at the other end of the mall. Or ask someone for the time.
 - Have a 30-second conversation with another shopper or a store worker. Once you get used to that, start having 60-second conversations.
 - Develop a fair amount of comfort with one step before moving on to the next.
- 3. *Control your negative thoughts. You're not anxious until you begin imagining negative outcomes or engage in negative self-talk. Those are the two actions that trigger anxiety.***
 - Note that they are actions, meaning they are things that you have to do. They might be habits and require little to no effort to perform, but they are still under your control. Think about something positive instead.
- 4. *Stay present. If your attention is focused on your environment or on the person you're interacting with, your anxiety will be much lower.***
 - When you're listening to someone speak, study their eyes or their nose. Put all of your focus on them rather than engaging with your thoughts. You'll be surprised by how much this helps!
- 5. *Use affirmations. Affirmations are one way of controlling your thoughts. Make a list of positive affirmations and use them whenever you're feeling shy. Here are a few suggestions:***
 - People are kind and interested in getting to know me.
 - People love me once they get to know me.
 - I am open to confidently meeting new and interesting people.
 - I am immune to the negative reactions of others.
 - I am a powerful and social person.
 - I love people and they love me.
- 6. *Change your perspective. Wouldn't you love to meet someone that was kind and friendly, even if they weren't perfect? Everyone feels the same way. You can be the kind, friendly person that everyone wants to meet. You don't have to be perfect or anything close to perfect. Just be kind and friendly.***
 - You'll have more friends than you know what to do with, but you have to let people get to know you.

You can learn to be more socially bold and comfortable with practice. Be patient with yourself and start slowly. A small improvement each week in your social comfort leads to significant progress very quickly. A little effort and courage are all that's required. You can overcome your shyness and feel a greater enjoyment for life. **For more on this subject and more, read: *Giving Candy To Strangers*... www.givingcandytostrangers.com/books**



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