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SHY KIDS? LET 'EM BE

BY CHRISTINE BROWER-COHEN

Plenty of kids are shy—one in five, says a study by Cornell University Cooperative Extension—yet we often try to talk our kids out of it. But shyness has perks, says Seth Meyers, Psy.D., a Los Angeles licensed clinical child psychologist. Kids who watch from the sidelines develop sharp observational skills. "Shy children become much more aware of subtleties in social interactions, and pick up on details their bubbly peers may miss. This often leads to strong communication skills later on," notes Meyers. Bashful kids usually grow into self-aware, confident adults. For now, Meyers lays out what not to say:

- **"Go on, just say 'Hi!'"** This pressure, however subtle, will only make your child more resistant to joining the group.
- **"Look! Jordan went over to them!"** Resist the impulse to compare kids. Comparison leads to self-doubt, low self-esteem, and resentment toward you (and Jordan).
- **"Oh, don't be shy!"** Haven't we all said that at least once? But it's dismissive of your child's feelings. And about as effective as telling Uncle Joe: "Oh, don't be overweight."

So what *should* you do? Ignore it! "Accept shyness as a personality trait," urges Meyers. Don't draw attention to it, and watch him flourish. Abe Lincoln was shy. And many introverts work alone to boost creativity; think Steve Jobs. Impressive company!

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