A WAY OF BEING
WITH CHILDREN

Engaging Withdrawn Children

Tips to Promote Child Well-Being and Resilience

Loud, outgoing, active, assertive children get noticed first. They are the ones whose behaviors clearly show us their wants, needs, and emotional states. This makes it easier to identify and intervene, as needed. Children who are quieter and more subdued in social settings are typically more unassuming, cautious, and careful. They are sometimes overlooked as needing extra help or support. \
Let's learn more about engaging with children who are quiet or withdrawn.

Withdrawn Children...

- Recharge by needing down time/quiet time on their own
- Seem to listen/observe a bit more than they speak
- Need additional processing time before responding
- Seem more reserved when expressing emotions
- Want to know what to expect ahead of time
- Are more likely to share ideas when encouraged rather than speaking up independently
- Prefer following directions more that taking initiative
- Need breaks between activities of high-energy or lots of engagement
- May be more reflective/introspective when experiencing emotions
- Seem more apprehensive when engaging in new activities
- Enjoy one-on-one conversation more than group talk

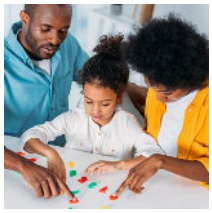
It's important to try to understand the underlying reason behind a child's withdrawn behavior... Is it purely their quieter nature, or is it cause for concern?

1. Temperament: Some children simply have a slow-to-warm-up temperament. They may approach new things more cautiously and take longer to trust people or adapt to new surroundings.
2. Preference for solitude: Many people have more subdued natures, They enjoy their own company and need alone time to recuperate; they are introverts. This is simply their nature; it is inappropriate to assign a value of good or bad to different personality types.
3. Social fear or anxiety: Social Anxiety Disorder is a clinical diagnosis that must be made by a mental health professional. It goes beyond being withdrawn or an introvert. It affects a child's ability to function appropriately in social situations and and may indicate the need for greater intervention,
4. Parenting and attachment styles: The presence or absence of a strong nurturing connection with parents and/or caregivers can assist or impede a child's ability to interact with others.
5. Cultural and/or language barriers: Cultural norms may result in differences in expectations; some cultures respect quietness and respect; others value expression and exuberance. Language barriers may well require additional processing time on the part of the child, giving the appearance of slowness or lack of interaction.
6. Sensory sensitivity: High sensory sensitivity may lead to withdrawn behaviors due to overstimulation.

Working with Withdrawn Children

Withdrawn Children...

- Are often empathic and perceptive
- Think before acting, so often enjoy fewer negative consequences
- Are in touch with their own and others' feelings
- May show reduced impulsivity
- Are good at planning/organizing/making long-term goals
- Avoid unnecessary risks
- Can be a calming presence for others
- Are often resilient
- Demonstrate patience; are able to delay gratification
- Can often develop stronger, more meaningful friendships



13 Tips & Techniques to Engage Withdrawn Children

1. Provide a safe, non-judgmental environment that feels inclusive for withdrawn children.
2. Reflect emotions to help withdrawn children identify and express what they are feeling.
3. Offer choices that include options that appeal to withdrawn children.
4. Avoid labels that place children with differing natures into boxes; we are all valuable individuals.
5. Use routines, so withdrawn children understand expectations and feel secure to open up and share.
6. Encourage withdrawn children when they initiate social interactions; provide positive reinforcement.
7. Provide alternative options for emotional expression that appeal more to withdrawn children.
8. Use small groups to encourage peer interaction; this may feel safer to a withdrawn child.
9. Practice coping skills and self-regulation, so withdrawn children develop confidence.
10. Engage children in leadership roles at the level where they feel comfortable.
11. Set personal goals for greater interaction with the child; acknowledge them when they try.
12. Allow the opportunity for children to observe initially before being involved; don't force interaction.
13. Be sensitive but don't "rescue" withdrawn children; teach them resilience and coping skills.

Great Reading Resources

For Young Children:

- *What to Do When You Feel Too Shy* -- Claire Freeland & Jacqueline Toner
- *When No One is Watching* -- Eileen Spinelli
- *The Invisible Boy* -- Trudy Ludwig
- *The Shy Creatures* -- David Mack

For Teens & Adults:

- *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* -- Stephen Chbosky
- *Quiet Power* -- Susan Cain

Get more resources at: www.centerforchildcounseling.org/awayofbeing

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