

Q&A

How to help kids overcome shyness and tips on creating a conducive infant care environment



FOR PROFESSIONALS

Q My five year-old child is shy and lacks confidence. What can I do to overcome this?

Dr May Lim: Firstly, it is important to realise that it is normal for a child to be shy and to take a while to warm up in an unfamiliar environment. Shyness is an aspect of temperament and each child is unique. Of those who are shy as children, only a small minority remain noticeably so by adolescence.

Children who are shy do not necessarily lack confidence. They may just need more time to establish familiarity with a new social environment. Self-esteem refers to one's sense of worth or abilities. Although some children may be shy, they may still have a healthy self-esteem, especially if they know that they have strengths in other areas. It is important for parents not to blame a child for being shy or tell the child to stop being shy. Instead, one can gently guide the child to make conversation and play or interact with others, then praise the child for how well this was done. Focus

on the success that the child had in warming up and interacting with unfamiliar people. Praise him/her for the quality of that interaction. When the child feels good about him/herself, his/her confidence and self-esteem will blossom too.

Q I believe that the environment acts as a 'third teacher'. How would this then apply to an infant care environment?

Dr Cynthia Lim : The Environment as the 'third teacher' in early childhood education is a concept associated with the Reggio Emilia approach to learning. This employs hands-on projects that allow children to see, touch and explore while having control over their learning. To function successfully as the third teacher, both the physical and social space where

infants are cared for have to be responsive to their needs and interests. This allows them to feel safe and secure, and provides opportunities for engagement and exploration.

Provide a variety of textures and surfaces to stimulate their senses as well as age-appropriate toys. Pay attention to details when choosing furniture like chairs, tables and utensils so that mobile infants can participate in their own meal times. Having a flexible layout helps so that you can vary the environment for the play and activity areas. If possible, have natural lighting and muted/natural colours.

Create spaces for infants to engage in hands-on and sensory experiences. Include a gym area with soft structures or wooden platforms, steps, and tunnels for the infants to practice gross motor skills.

The social domain of the environment is also crucial and this depends on the type and tone of the interactions. Those which are responsive to the child's moods and needs include reassuring a frightened child, showing interest in a child's play and displaying affection in caregiving routines. Give the child choices and allow the child to take the lead. Do not interrupt the child's activities and be sure to warn a baby before picking him/her up. Conduct these interactions in a calm, manner and in a warm tone of voice. ♥

FOR PARENTS



Children who are shy may just need more time to be familiar with a new social environment.

DR MAY LIM

Ask the experts!



DR MAY LIM is an occupational therapist who has worked with children with development delays and disorders in Singapore and Australia. She earned her Bachelor's degree in the UK, did a fellowship programme in USA and completed her PhD in Australia. She has published a book and 16 research articles, and is an Assistant Professor at the Singapore Institute of Technology. She is a member of the Child Development Network Public Education & Outreach Sub-Committee.



DR CYNTHIA LIM is an adjunct lecturer at NIE (NTU) and UniSIM. She has over 20 years of experience in education and law, including professional development, curriculum design and working with parents and students. Her interest is in promoting learning and development for infants and toddlers. Dr Lim has written articles and spoken at conferences and seminars in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and Malaysia.