

WHY SAYING "THEY ARE JUST SHY" IS NOT HELPFUL

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When a child hides behind a parent or stays quiet, adults often say they are 'just shy'. This is usually said with kindness, to explain the child's behaviour or protect them from pressure.

But children are always listening. They can take these words to heart, even when they are not spoken directly to them.

WHAT THE CHILD MIGHT BE FEELING



Anxious



Unsure



Overwhelmed



In need of safety

WHAT CHILDREN MAY START TO BELIEVE



"This is just who I am"



"I can't cope with people"



"Other people will speak for me"

These are normal feelings. They are not a fixed part of the child's personality.

They may start to see shyness as fixed, rather than something that can ease with time and safety.

WHAT TO DO AND SAY INSTEAD



GIVE THEM TIME
Let the child stay close until they feel ready. Some children take longer to warm up.



NAME THE FEELING, NOT THE CHILD
Try: "Meeting new people can feel tricky at first."



SPEAK TO THE CHILD, NOT ABOUT THEM
Say: "You can stay by me until you feel ready."
Avoid explaining their behaviour over their head.



LET CONFIDENCE GROW NATURALLY
Children feel braver when they feel safe and understood, not rushed or labelled.

✗ IF YOU CHOOSE TO EXPLAIN ✓

Instead of:
"(S)he is just shy"

Try: "(S)he is taking her/his time."

Try: "(S)he might join in when ready."

Try: "(S)he usually says hello once (s)he gets to know people."



CHILDREN DO NOT NEED LABELS.
THEY NEED TIME, SAFETY AND ENCOURAGEMENT.



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