



# Rifka Schönfeld **STRATEGIES**

THE NEWSLETTER FOR OPTIMUM SUCCESS

TIPS ON SOCIAL SKILLS FOR ADULTS & CHILDREN

## Are You an Innie or an Outie?

Dear Readers,

This week's newsletter will discuss the topic of introversion and how to fix it...

Rifka Schönfeld  
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### QUESTION:

A teacher recently described my 15-year-old daughter, who has always been on the quiet side, as "introverted." What, exactly, is introversion? And how can I fix it?



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**ANSWER:**

Let me answer your first question: prominent twentieth century psychologist Carl Jung defines introversion as the tendency toward being wholly or predominantly concerned with and interested in one's own mental life. That is, introverts' energy expands through reflection and declines during social interaction. People who are introverted enjoy solitary activities such as reading, drawing, listening to music, or hiking.

Many people think that introversion is synonymous with shyness – but in reality – this is not the case. People who are shy are nervous about social interactions, but once they are comfortable are no longer anxious. People who are introverts may be shy, but this is independent of their introverted status.

For those who are introverted, being with people often feels like it is sapping their energy – even if they themselves have great social skills. Because of this perceived depletion of energy, after a party or meeting, they will need time alone in order to recharge.

While we always want our children to be extroverted or gregarious and social, there are surprising benefits to introversion. First, research has shown that almost 60% of gifted children are introverted, while only about 25-40% of regular children are introverted. Perhaps this is because introverted children naturally gravitate towards activities that exercise their brains and stimulate their thoughts. Second, many of the world's great writers, artists, engineers, composers, and inventors tended towards introversion. With extra time to ponder their own thoughts and ideas, they succeeded in creating lasting contributions to society.

Now let's move on to your second question: how can you fix introversion? I would like to reframe that question – and say “should you fix introversion?” If your daughter has a few close friends who she speaks to on a consistent basis, but tends to avoid large groups, let her be. Children only need three or four good friends in order to have companionship and develop socially.

However, if your daughter seems completely cut off from her peers, there is the danger that she



could be depressed. Without social interaction with her peers, your daughter would be losing out on vital opportunities to mature within society. In that case, intervention is essential. Here are some ideas to consider in order to help her become slightly more extroverted:

- **Afterschool clubs:** Help your daughter play to her strengths by signing her up for an extra-curricular activity that she enjoys. Even if the activity itself is solitary (i.e. knitting), you will be helping her interact with like-minded people. This in turn will create a community of people that your daughter might feel comfortable socializing with.
- **Social skills coaching:** Social skills are generally learned through trial and error in an organic process that does not require instruction. However, there are children who need explicit directions because social skills do not come naturally to them. For these children, social skills coaching can be immensely beneficial.
- **Chesed projects:** Help your daughter find an activity that helps others that she would enjoy. Some teens bake challah and deliver it to the needy on Friday afternoons. Others visit nursing home to chat with the elderly residents. Then, go along for the first few times to give your daughter an idea of the appropriate social interactions. Eventually, she can do this on her own – and she'll be gaining both social skills and a mitzvah!

Just remember, introversion is not inherently negative. For some people – it is entirely right and even beneficial. Therefore, observe and consult with your daughter. She might be perfectly happy just the way she is.

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