

By Melissa Taylor

Is Your Child an INNIE?

Understanding your introverted child's temperament



While introverts make up 25% of our population, the world is geared toward the extrovert, and the introvert is often misunderstood.

I admit I didn't understand my own daughter. I couldn't figure out why she acted the way she did, why she preferred to watch, why she liked to play alone. Then I learned about introversion.

Introversion is a personality trait, a temperament. An introverted person prefers to recharge his energy with time spent alone. Conversely, an extroverted person receives her energy from time spent with other people. You probably recognize these famous introverts -- Albert Einstein, Monet, Julia Roberts, David Letterman, Jane Goodall and Charles Schultz. A common confusion is that shyness and introversion are the same thing. They aren't. Shyness is a social anxiety, not an innate temperament.

If your child has an introverted temperament, he or she will have particular characteristics and strengths. Learning and understanding these will benefit you, your child and others, including your child's teacher.

“Dear Mrs. Taylor,” the email began, “Annika is refusing to participate in reading group. . .”

When I asked my daughter, Annika, about it later, she said, “She wanted me to read the boy part in front of everyone.”

I've watched my daughter for six years and know that she not only prefers to watch, she's happy watching - even during things like art and music. Not only that, it's uncomfortable for her to join in. In fact, it took her three years of preschool before she brought something for “show and share”. For me, discovering that my daughter was an introvert (innie) made all the difference in the world to understanding and appreciating her.

Temperament, Your Child and You

Ray Lincoln, of Littleton, counselor and author of *I'm a Keeper*, suggests parents first look at their own temperaments before looking at the temperaments of their children. Doing so, he says, gives parents “a clear understanding of how they are seeing their child.” Lincoln recommends tests like Myers/Briggs, Keirsey and Harkey/Jourgensen and includes a brief test in his book.

Without a formal test, you still can guess both your child's and your own temperament by observation. For example, if you feel exhausted from being around people and like to recharge alone, you're probably an introvert. But, if you seek out others in order to gain energy, you're most likely an extrovert. Now look at your child. Does he get his energy from others or does he need time alone to recharge?

Introverted Characteristics and Misunderstandings

Here's a helpful list of characteristics that may describe your child if he or she is introverted from *The Hidden Gifts of the Introverted Child* by Dr. Olsen-Laney.

- Acts quiet in many situations but may be chatty in comfortable surroundings
- Feels tired after social outings and needs time to recharge in quiet
- Looks and sounds hesitant at times
- Stands a bit away from the action and observes
- Enters new situations slowly
- Looks away when speaking but makes good eye contact when listening
- Has difficulty with transitions

As in my daughter's case, introverted characteristics are sometimes misunderstood. Here are a few examples of how that can happen.

Innie Characteristic	⇒ Common Misunderstanding
Observes in new situations	⇒ Shy (may or may not be true)
Looks away when speaking	⇒ Poor manners; rude
Looks and sounds hesitant	⇒ Not smart (introverts are often gifted)
Needs time to recharge in quiet	⇒ Anti-social

Now, if these same characteristics are understood as related to temperament, the perception shifts and the behavior can be seen as a strength.

Innie Characteristic	⇒ Strength
Observes in new situations	⇒ Notices details others miss
Looks away when speaking	⇒ Self-reflective
Looks and sounds hesitant	⇒ Thoughtful, not impulsive
Needs time to recharge in quiet	⇒ Creative, good reader

To an extrovert, an introvert's behaviors can be hard to comprehend. If an introvert looks away when speaking, she is not trying to be rude, she thinks better this way. Or, if an introverted child won't join the bowling birthday party, most likely after watching, he will participate. Understanding an introverted temperament will change our perceptions of an innie's behaviors.

Introverts at Home and School

At home, introverts do best with structure and predictability. If you have an introvert, you already know that they need to be prepared for transitions. Not only that, innies love the comfort of their own

space so they have a predictable place to recharge.

After school is usually not the best time to talk or do homework because an introverted child's energy is depleted. Chat later, after your child has had down time. Ask open-ended, specific questions such as, "How did your math test go?" instead of yes or no questions like, "Was school good?". Likewise, schedule homework time after your introvert is reenergized.

When your child starts school it can be difficult and a huge energy drain. According to Jill D. Burrus and Lisa Kaenzig, of The College of William and Mary, "School is not a positive place for many . . . introverts. It can be loud, crowded, superficial, boring, overstimulating and focused on action, not reflection. How much of a day do you believe is dedicated to private reflection or enforced quiet? Modern schools seem to be designed for extroverts."

For introverted students, Burrus and Kaenzig recommend structure, small groups and independent work like journaling, quiet time, activities with minimal noise and stimulation. The pair stress that introverts need "wait time" or extra time for the child to respond to a question; introverts usually need longer think time than extroverts.

As a parent, work with your child and the teacher to deal with the challenges of school. Reassure the teacher that your child wants to show her knowledge but may not be comfortable raising her hand to participate. Help your child learn to communicate with the teacher to ask questions and show her knowledge by writing notes or planning a quiet time to ask the teacher a question. Teach him to use his inner voice to feel calm and work through his stress.

Both at school and at home, when it comes to friends, most introverts prefer to have one or two





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School Years

close friendships. This isn't a reflection on the child's popularity or likeability, just the child's preference. But, if you feel concerned, you can encourage social skills by practicing conversation and reflective listening.

With activities, choose ones that help your child find new skills, meet different people and complement their temperament. For example, band, photography, volunteering or individual sports like swimming, tennis, gymnastics or martial arts work well for introverts. In general, it's best to limit after-school activities since school consumes so much energy.

If your child is an introvert, your knowledge of their temperament will help them develop, grow, and appreciate her own strengths. That plus your love are the best gifts a parent can give to a child. ♦

Strengths of an Introvert

- Notices details others miss
- Self-reflective
- Thoughtful, not impulsive
- High emotional IQ
- Creative
- Enjoys their own company

Is Your Child an Introvert?

Answer yes or no to the following questions.

- Is your child more of a listener than a talker?
- Does your child like spending time alone?
- Does your child have a few close friends?
- Is your child calm and self contained?
- Does your child notice details others miss?
- Does your child like to watch before he participates?
- Does your child become grouchy if she is around people too long?

If you answered mostly yes, your child is most likely an introvert.