

ultimately would like to adopt. Allowing yourself time to practice new social skills and to work through the anxieties and frustrations which often accompany the change process, increases the likelihood that you will successfully abandon your shyness demeanor.

The UCI Counseling Center is a place you can turn to for help in overcoming your shyness. Support group and skill building groups aimed at developing social confidence are offered regularly.

## Shyness

We gratefully acknowledge the work and effort dedicated by the staff at UCLA's Student Psychological services in providing this information.

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## Shyness

Shy people have often been described as timid, lacking in self-assertion, reticent to engage socially, reserved when in the presence of others, not easily approachable, and as overly concerned with being evaluated negatively by others. The truth is that there is not one commonly accepted definition of shyness as it means different things to different people. For some, the experience of being shy is only a mild discomfort and does not interfere with their lives to any significant degree. For others, however, it is a very disruptive experience, a sort of mental handicap that can feel especially crippling.

Those people for whom shyness is a problem often report feeling lonely, depressed, and anxious. They also report feeling self-conscious, and preoccupied with wondering how others perceive them. Feeling awkward, inadequate, and hampered, particularly in their attempts to take advantage of some of life's more pleasant

opportunities such as establishing relationships with others, is also a common report. Blushing, increased heart pounding, and "butterflies in the stomach" are the bodily reactions most commonly reported by shy people.

Theories abound as to how and why people become shy. It has been speculated, for example, that shyness is innate. Another contention is that shyness is the result of some inner-psychic conflict in early childhood. It is also believed that shyness is the result of learning or social programming. While there is disagreement on how people become shy, it is widely accepted that shyness is common and universal. It can be seen in different cultural groups. It is prevalent in school children as well as in adults, and it appears to affect men and women equally.

Many people cope with their shyness by simply avoiding those situations that trigger their discomfort. In extreme cases, people attempt to cover up their shyness in social situations by using alcohol and drugs. Some shy people seek to understand their shyness and accept it as part of who they are. This

latter group tends to look at the positive side of shyness. They view the increased personal privacy and solitude as a valuable way to spend time.

Overcoming shyness is possible, particularly when there is a willingness to change or modify how one thinks about oneself and about one's shyness, and when there is a corresponding willingness to change or modify one's shyness behavior.

An important prerequisite to change is the establishment of a belief that change is possible. Admittedly, adopting such a belief could be difficult, particularly when shyness has been a longstanding problem. It is not impossible, however, to turn cynical notions about change into a more optimistic and well founded belief that change can occur.

Committing yourself to the process of change by investing the necessary time and energy is also required. Becoming less shy and more self-assured involves taking stock of your inabilities and weaknesses, as well as your strengths and assets. It also involves risk-taking, developing new social skills, and knowing what attitudes and behaviors you