



# FROM SHYNESS

Do any of these situations sound familiar to you:

- *Youth conference makes you uncomfortable because there are so many new people.*
- *You know the answer to a question in class but are afraid to raise your hand.*
- *The bishop asks you to give a talk and you just might faint because you are so nervous.*

If so, then you probably consider yourself shy. So what can you do about it? A look at what might cause you to shy away from certain situations may be your first clue.

**By Mindy Raye Friedman**  
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*Shyness may seem like an immovable barrier. But you can push it out of the way a little at a time.*

## Why Am I Shy?

There are two types of shy people according to Dr. Larry Nelson, an associate professor of human development at Brigham Young University whose research focuses on shyness. The first type of shy people are *physiologically shy*. They are born with a nervous system that is quick to respond in stressful situations and slow to calm back down afterward.

In order for non-shy people to understand, Dr. Nelson uses the analogy of watching a scary movie. The average person enters the theater with normal breathing and heart rate. When the scary part of the movie comes, their blood pressure rises, their breathing becomes more shallow, and their muscles tense. So they

start at a low stress level and then increase.

Physiologically shy people, by contrast, are already at a heightened level of stress before they get to the stressful situation. So when they get stressed, their response is much more elevated than the average person. Their bodies' reactions basically overwhelm them.

Dr. Nelson says about 15 percent of people (almost 1 in 7) are born physiologically shy. However, every year he will ask his students to raise a hand if they think they are shy, and usually more than 60 percent do. So, why do so many people label themselves as shy?

"They think the fact that their heart starts to beat faster on a first date or at a job interview or while speaking in church means they are shy," Dr. Nelson explains. "Well, that's a normal response to those settings."

Another reason for the difference may be because some of those people are *self-consciously shy*. This type of shyness happens often among youth when they become very preoccupied with what other people think of them.

"There are some individuals who are so self-conscious about what others think that they pull back because they are so concerned about negative perceptions or judgments of others on them," Dr. Nelson says.

This self-conscious feeling leads to a higher stress response in those situations where they think others may be judging them.

### **Making the Change**

Regardless of which type of shy you are, in order to overcome any weakness, you have to

# TO

# STRENGTH

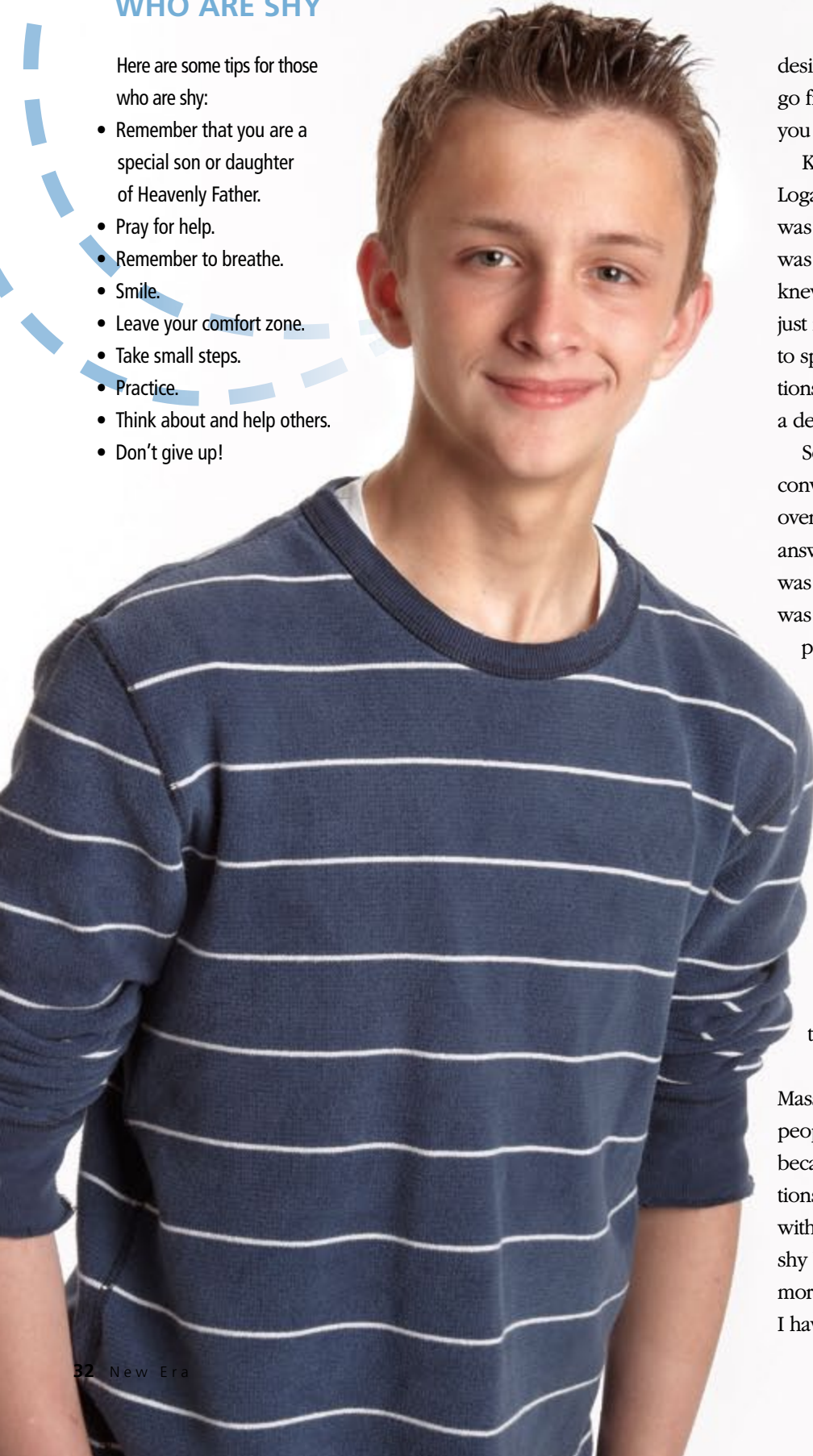


# TIPS

## FOR THOSE WHO ARE SHY

Here are some tips for those who are shy:

- Remember that you are a special son or daughter of Heavenly Father.
- Pray for help.
- Remember to breathe.
- Smile.
- Leave your comfort zone.
- Take small steps.
- Practice.
- Think about and help others.
- Don't give up!



desire to change and to overcome it. You won't go from being shy to outgoing overnight, but if you start today, you can make progress.

Kallie Sommercorn, 19, who is in college in Logan, Utah, says she used to be shy when she was younger. "I would freeze up whenever I was put in social situations," she says. "I never knew what to say, and I always felt like I would just make a fool of myself." She was also afraid to speak in front of people or to answer questions in class. "Once high school hit, I really had a desire to change this," she says.

So Kallie started involving herself more in conversations. Although she used to stumble over her words when talking with friends or answering questions in class, with practice she was able to overcome most of her shyness. "It was a lot easier when I finally realized that people didn't think what I was saying was dumb."

If you are self-consciously shy like Kallie was, the first step is to realize that shyness doesn't change your divine worth. Often we have a warped view of ourselves and feel like our worth comes from grades or beauty or what we think others think about us. Then we start to compare ourselves to others and lower our self-esteem. Instead, focus on the fact that everyone is a child of God. Stop comparing yourself to others, and it will be easier to form friendships.

Tyler McGill, 15, from Kingston, Massachusetts, is shy when he meets new people. He finds it hard to make friends because it is difficult for him to start conversations, so he tries to find something in common with people. "I have tried to overcome being shy by going to stake activities and participating more and communicating with the youth that I have more in common with," he says.

## From Boulder to Bolder

Dr. Nelson says overcoming shyness is like trying to push a boulder up a mountain. You wouldn't want to push it straight up in one great shove, but you can push it slowly a little at a time. He suggests that those who are physiologically shy should make challenging but achievable goals and then work gradually but steadily at overcoming their shyness.

Nick Reisner, 17, from Midvale, Utah, says he feels shy around people he doesn't know well. But he set the goal of "getting to know people in situations where I don't know them," Nick says. "You need to try to have experiences that get you out of your comfort zone." Nick says that as he became more comfortable, he found that "it became fun to start talking to people."

Anna Melville, 23, an outgoing young adult from San Jose, California, remembers an experience she had when she was 12 and "incredibly shy." She went to a stake youth activity where she just stayed with the friends she knew until one friend brought over some new people.

"One of the new boys asked me a question, and suddenly it seemed like everybody's eyes were on me, and I couldn't think of an answer," she remembers. "At that moment, I panicked and left the room in a hurry. I ran down the hall with tears running down my face and hid myself in a classroom until I calmed down. I just couldn't handle the pressure."

So how did she get where she is today? By pushing the shyness boulder away a little at a time.

"At first I would only hang out with a few people, but slowly, as I did this, I became more confident around others," Anna says. She would tell youth that they need to stretch themselves. "Force yourself to try a new thing, and whether you're successful or not, you'll be better for trying it."



# TIPS

## FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT SHY

Not shy? Here's what you can do to help those who are:

### DO

- Include everyone in activities and conversations.
- Give compliments.
- Go with shy friends to meet new people.
- Find out about shy people's talents.
- Listen.
- Show genuine interest.
- Do some role-playing.

### DON'T

- Interrupt people when they are talking.
- Point out that a person is shy.
- Force a shy person into a situation where he or she is unprepared and uncomfortable.
- Speak or do things for your shy friend.

## GIVE IT A TRY

I was very shy in high school and did not take advantage of opportunities to enlarge and build my talents. I was afraid to try. . . . Don't be afraid to try. Have confidence in yourself. You won't succeed the first time on anything you do, but successive attempts will bring confidence and the development of new talents."

Elder L. Tom Perry  
of the Quorum of  
the Twelve Apostles,  
"Sharing Family Heritage,"  
*Ensign*, Sept. 2006, 8.

## Take Advantage of Your Strengths

Another way to work on overcoming shyness is to find something you enjoy or are good at that you aren't afraid to share. That is what Allyse Meanea from New Harmony, Utah, did.

Allyse says she is shy around people she doesn't know and that she has a fear of public speaking. "I think people will think the worst of me and that it won't turn out well." But Allyse likes to dance and was given the opportunity to do a solo dance in front of a group of people.

"When I'm dancing, I'm not nervous or shy. I can forget about myself and those people and concentrate on what I am doing. I couldn't talk in front of people, but I can dance in front of them just fine."

## Move Forward in Faith

One thing you can't forget is to involve the Lord in your self-improvement. Pray and remember that the Lord promised that if you come unto Him, He will help you and turn your weakness into strength (see Ether 12:27).

"I would pray and pray and pray that someone would help me overcome my shyness, but then I realized that I needed the Lord's help to overcome it," Kallie says.

"Pray to Heavenly Father for help to not be shy," Nick says. "Then get out there and try new situations

and meet people." The Lord will help you.

Our life on earth is about progressing. Being shy is a challenge, but overcoming it will help you grow. Don't let your shyness cause you to leave the Church or not go on a mission because you don't want to be put in stressful situations. Get help and work toward your goals.

Your fear and your stress response may never go away, especially if you are one of those people who is physiologically shy. But if you practice, you will learn how to deal with those responses and be successful in stressful situations. Just remember to push the boulder slowly but steadily, make challenging and achievable goals, and keep moving forward. **NE**

