

Shyness has become pathologized as social anxiety - Dr. Gordon Neufeld

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SUMMARY

Shyness is often misinterpreted as social anxiety, but it is a natural part of child development that serves to protect existing attachments. Understanding shyness as a protective mechanism can help parents support their children rather than pathologize their behavior.

- *Shyness is a natural behavior, not a disorder.*
- *It typically emerges around five months of age as "stranger protest."*
- *Shyness helps protect existing attachments, ensuring children bond with familiar caregivers.*
- *Mislabeling shyness as social anxiety can lead to unnecessary concern among parents.*
- *Children generally outgrow shyness as their attachment needs decrease.*
- *Supporting a child's existing attachments can help alleviate shyness.*
- *Recognizing shyness as part of development can foster healthier emotional growth.*

Speaker 1: Shyness has become pathologized as social anxiety by individuals who do not understand shyness at all. Many parents are concerned about shyness in their children. We should be concerned. If a child was not shy, that actually is of far more concern. Shyness is absolutely natural. In fact, it's part of the attachment repertoire. We are never shy with those that we're attached to and we shy away from contact, closeness, from talking to, from agreeing with those that we're not attached to.

Speaker 1: It's nature natural way of protecting existing attachments. It shows up about five months of age. The first term for shyness is stranger protest. And nature says, okay, this child has got the attachments they need. Now we got to develop them and we're going to protect this child from attaching to anyone else. Now they can only attach to the people mom and dad are attached to. And this is the way it was designed to be able to build a consistent village of attachment for a child to be raised.

Speaker 1: Unfortunately, shyness has become pathologized as social anxiety by individuals who do not understand shyness at all. If we honoured it, if we understood it, it would tell us that nature is only trying to protect the existing attachments. If we try to protect the existing attachments, if we go in through a child's existing attachments, then the shyness just melts away. Children will grow out of shyness ultimately, as they need attachments less. But when their attachment needs are strong, shyness is just part of the picture.