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# How to Teach Your Introvert

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# *How to Teach Your Introvert*

In our extraverted society, introverts have it tough. Misunderstanding of this unique personality type is all too common, often leading to an extremely poor learning experience.

Introverts naturally tend toward territorialism. They're happy to be alone. Large groups and constant noise can easily drain their energy. They often prefer listening over speaking, and they don't share private thoughts with just anyone.

This can make the traditional school environment a tough one for an introvert to deal with. Even homeschool environments don't always suit the introverted learning style—after all, they can't do everything by themselves.

*Nor should they.*





## *What is the best way to teach your introverted student?*

For starters, you need perspective and understanding which will inform your entire relationship with your student. So, before we get into the practical tips, let's take a moment to really understand how your introvert works.

### *Introvert vs. Extravert*

While the “introvert vs. extravert” topic has quickly dominated the soft sciences, being popularized by modern media and TED talks [like this one](#), it originally began back in the nineteenth century when the psychologist Carl Jung first defined the two distinct personality preferences.

**Quick Note:** Nowadays, you'll find the word *extravert* spelled with an "o" (*extrovert*) on many blogs and web pages. However the classical spelling, defined by Carl Jung in the 1800's, is with an "a." The prefix "extra" means "outside," or "beyond."

That's why we decided to use the classical spelling in our ebook.

However, due to the recent hubbub and increase in uninformed onlookers identifying themselves as one or the other, many people get confused on what the differences really are between introverts and extraverts.

The truth is, we all walk a line between introversion and extraversion. Even Jung himself said no one person is completely introverted or extraverted. Most of us fall on one side or the other of a continuum, some landing closer to the middle and some nearly touching one edge.

And that's exactly what makes it hard to pin down a “correct” diagnosis.

Soon we begin labelling ourselves and others as introverted or extraverted and treat each other thusly. But the only clues our uneducated minds have to go on are what we can see externally. The problem is, what we see externally doesn't always tell the whole story.

For example, I have a highly introverted friend who can easily be mistaken for an extravert. Talkative, funny, and interesting, he intentionally pursues relationships and loves hosting Game Days at his apartment. At first even I mistook him for an extravert.

In contrast, one of my co-worker (definitely an extravert) enjoys activities like writing and reading above almost anything else. She does her best work alone, and after a long day, all she really wants to do is come home and crash in her room—by herself. Does that make her an introvert?

Before we can understand how to teach an introvert, we need to understand what the word “introvert” means, and how it differs from its counterpart.

*Extraverted attitude:*

*a standpoint characterized by an **outward** flowing of personal energy.*

*Extraverts place an emphasis on objectivity and surrounding influences.*

*Introverted Attitude:*

*a standpoint characterized by an **inward** flowing of personal energy.*

*Introverts place more emphasis on their subjective view of the world.*

*Let me help you understand what this means...*

## *The Biology of Introversion*

Introversion isn't a description of the things your child does, but rather how he thinks.

Researchers agree that the **base differences between introverts and extraverts comes down to how they process rewards and external stimuli**, much of which is dependent on the hormone dopamine.

*In one 2005 study*, participants (both introverts and extraverts) were asked to play a gambling game while wired into a brain scanner, allowing researchers to study their chemical reactions to risks and surprises.

*“When the gambles they took paid off, the more extraverted group showed a stronger response in two crucial brain regions: the amygdala and the nucleus accumbens.”*

Reference: *What makes us extroverts and introverts?*

These two regions are known for *processing emotional stimuli* (amygdala) and as a *key part of the dopamine system*, the brain's reward circuitry (nucleus accumbens).

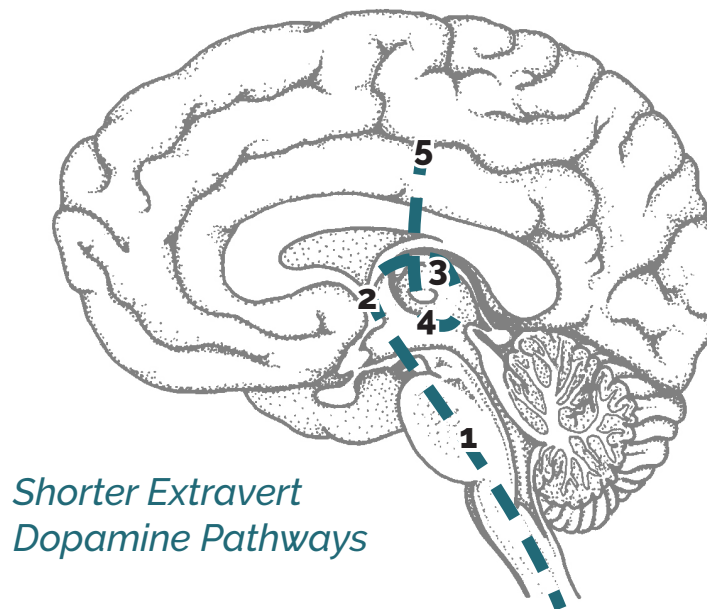
*Further research* indicates extraverts' reward systems are more vigorously activated not only when participating in risk-taking activities, but when processing *all* stimuli.



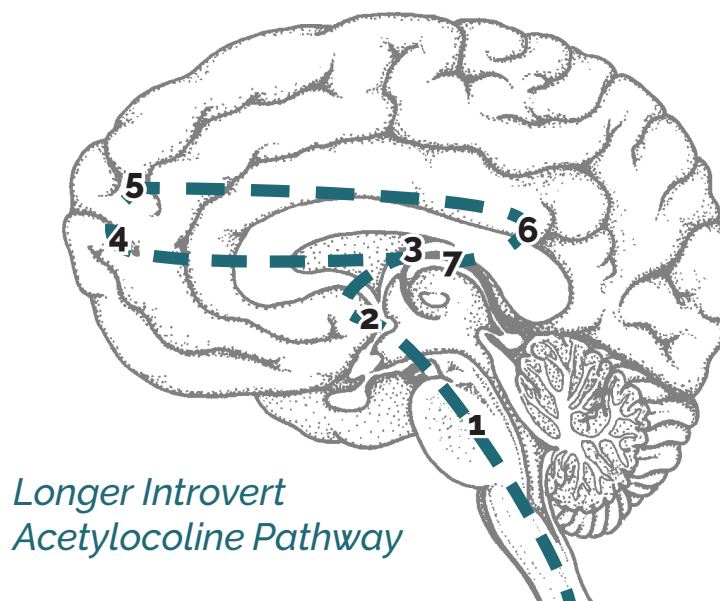
So why are extraverts chemically rewarded for these more “high risk, high energy” tasks, when introverts are not?

*That boils down to the way their brains translate information:*

- The extraverted brain processes stimuli over a relatively short path—running through an area where taste, touch, visual, and auditory sensory processing takes place.



- For introverts, however, the process is a longer one. The information relay instead runs through a complicated pathway in the front of the brain—the areas associated with remembering, planning, and problem solving.



## *What a simple answer!*

**The way introverts process stimuli simply takes longer.** For them, processing more stimuli means expending more mental energy. And that's *tiring*! Further still, because of their less active dopamine centers, spending that much energy on a new activity often just isn't worth it.

Thus, introverts tend to remove themselves from excess stimuli, stick with the familiar, and jump into new activities more slowly than extraverts (who get excited about new activities and quickly tire of the “same old same old”—a result of higher dopamine production and sense-oriented processing).

It's these basic chemical differences that lead extraverts and introverts into displaying those predictable, measurable patterns of activity. And this is also why it's *extremely* important not to “misdiagnose” your student lest you end up teaching them in a way that is completely unsuited to their natural learning style.

## *How Can You Know if Your Child is an Introvert?*

*The simple answer: **pay attention.***

Pay attention to what your child does, how he spends his free time, what he talks about, what he gets excited about, and—most importantly—how he processes information.

The only way to understand if your student is introverted is to know how he thinks and processes stimuli. If he seems like a talker to you, that doesn't necessarily mean he's extraverted. For instance, what is he talking about? Is he relaying something cool he learned on his own time, or is he using that conversation to piece together his findings and assemble them into an understandable whole?



The first method is often tied to introversion, whereas the second is a more extraverted trait.

Pay attention to his interaction with more than just his family and “safe circle.” You can learn a lot by observing the way he interacts with the world around him.

If you’d like to consider a more clinical approach to help you identify your student’s preference, there are also several assessments you can have him take.

Try looking into the official [\*Myers Briggs Type Indicator\*](#) (administered by a consultant)

Or, if you are okay just getting a rough estimate, rather than an actual “diagnosis,” try visiting a site like [\*16personalities.com\*](#) for a 12-minute assessment and explanation of the different preferences.

[\*Personalitypage.com\*](#) also has some great extra resources.

## *Society*

Unfortunately, western society often favors the extravert.

As the industrialization movement of the late 1700’s took off, the west had to come up with an organized way to cope with education, shift management, and day-to-day social processes. We began working to the clock rather than the sun, and our view of work was changed to support a “team effort,” rather than the previous individualistic approach.



In the education revolution, which happened around the same time, we needed a standard way to deliver information and assess student progress. Since more and more children were publicly educated, class sizes also grew. This naturally assisted in the “social” orientation: increasing stimulus, and viewing the more vocal, outgoing, and “stand-outish” kids as the most successful.

But as you already know, this one-size-fits-all mentality just doesn’t work. Even worse, this mentality often portrays introverts as the “outcasts.” They’re the quiet ones who talk differently, think differently, enjoy different activities, and just don’t fit in. This mentality opens the floodgates for judgement and ridicule, causing many introverts to simply shut down.

*But the world needs introverts, even if it doesn’t know it. Just think about folks like Bill Gates, Abraham Lincoln, Eleanor Roosevelt, Albert Einstein, Gandhi, and Rosa Parks—all introverts.*

Unfortunately society takes a long time to change. Though the Industrial Revolution ended with the rise of technology, it’s taken decades for employers and school boards to realize this. And it’s taking even longer for them to begin implementing any sort of change.

So what are the best ways you can prepare your introvert during the most vital educational period of his life? How can you help him learn the way that suits him best? How can you teach him to foster his healthy introverted tendencies and reconcile them with the rest of the world?

# *How to Teach Your Introvert*

## *Avoid the Word “Normal”*

We as humans enjoy creating definitions and boxes to help us better understand the phenomena of our daily lives. Knowing a person fits into a standard “type” helps us wrap our minds around the broad category of this person.

One of the types we’ve created is called “normal.”

As we mentioned before, society has been engineered to favor the extraverted student. Young children must adhere to this warped sense of *normal* lest they risk being called “different,” “weird,” or, heaven forbid, “sick.”

However, people never fit squarely into boxes. Students vary greatly based on their personality, interests, natural ability, etc.

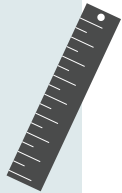
## *Practical Tips:*



### **Forget schoolrooms**

You’re homeschooling for a reason. I know families who work best on a rigid schedule with desks, class times, and homework due dates. But for the majority of homeschool families, the “school time” tactic just doesn’t work.

Forget the school room. Forget the “teaching time.” Allow your student to explore curriculum on their own, work through the homework you give them, and come to you to learn things as they need it.



### **Chuck the one-size-fits-all curricula**

Introverts work for internal rewards more than external ones. So you want to foster that love as much as possible.

Find what they think is interesting and hone that interest. Allow them to spend more time on the subjects they love and foster interest in the “boring” subjects by helping them apply that learning to their lives. This will aid in cultivating an innate love of learning which will last far beyond their school days.



### **Use effort-based accomplishment**

Especially when it comes to grading more nebulous activities like writing, it's important to provide your child with a basic rubric (expected learning outcomes), and grade them based upon that. There are two grades when using this system: A for Acceptable, and N for Not Complete. If your student is not understanding and practicing the learning outcomes you've defined in your rubric, send their work back for a second try.

If you want further teaching on effort-based grades, I would recommend Andrew Pudewa's free ebook, [Marking and Grading](#).

### ***Give Your Introvert Space***

Introverts are a particularly private bunch. Having someone hover over their shoulder and watch everything they do or providing constant stimulation can quickly become overwhelming, resulting in poor performance and a loss of valuable learning.

## *Practical Tips:*



### **Give your student deadlines**

This is a great way to prepare your student for inevitable expectations enforced by employers, managers, and the world in general. Don't hover or nag, instead give your student deadlines and maybe a little guidance, but then allow them the freedom to accomplish tasks his way.



### **Build quiet time into every school day**

Even when not working on a particular project, your introvert needs plenty of time to himself to think and reflect on the stimulation around him. Building quiet time into their day will allow your student to recharge their batteries and keep himself mentally healthy.



### **Try a flipped classroom**

Don't demand instant answers. Allow your student to chew on a problem or work it out on their own before coming back to you with an answer. Once they prepare their thoughts beforehand, a small-scale group discussion can help them learn new ideas and new ways of thinking. An especially helpful technique when applied to homeschool groups, this can help your introvert feel like "part of the group" without fear of failure or rejection.

## *Help Your Introvert Socialize*

It's worth mentioning that while introverts definitely have a unique way of interacting with the rest of the world, ***they still need to interact with the rest of the world!***

One of the first things God said after creating man was "it is not good for man to be alone" (Gen. 2:18). He Himself desires, above all else, to have relationship with His creation! Who are we to say we can ignore the very thing God created us for?



## *Practical Tips:*



### **Give him a gentle push**

A little socialization can be good for an introvert, even if it comes with resistance. I'm not advising you force your introvert to behave like an extravert, but the fact of the matter is kids (especially young kids) don't often know what they need. But you do.

Start a homeschool co-op, get them involved in a team, or just organize a sleepover with their best friend. Your student doesn't need a full social calendar every day, but she does need interaction. Don't be afraid to gently nudge her into new things.



### **Provide a safety net**

Introverts get embarrassed easily. Being singled out or having any attention drawn to themselves, especially when that attention is negative, can be more damaging than you realize. They need a private place to learn that it's okay to fail.

Little tricks like not interrupting their speech will help you create this safe atmosphere. Especially when correcting your student, do your best to correct in private and speak their language so that they can more easily understand the concept you're trying to teach.



### **Try small-scale socializing**

Having one or two friends over instead of a big party at the park can be the perfect way for an introvert to socialize. Allow him to be himself. Allow him to be private. Especially if he's still uncomfortable socializing, easing him into more brief interactions (perhaps an afternoon, rather than an all-day thing) can help him feel more at ease, knowing he will have time by himself later.

By allowing for limited interactions, your introvert will begin to feel more familiar and more comfortable. Once he feels like he can be himself, his relationships have the freedom to develop into deep, meaningful interactions, and your student's innate need for people will be satisfied.

## *Provide Individualized Learning*

We've already established that one-size-fits-all just doesn't work. Especially for introverts.

The status quo was designed with the extravert in mind. Not to say introverts can't produce good work and learn using the pre-designated methods of society, but those regimes just aren't a good natural fit and should be improved upon whenever possible.

So what can you do to help foster your introvert's natural learning tendencies instead of forcing him into a box?

### *Practical tips:*



#### **Encourage one-on-one coaching**

Introverts dislike the unknown, but having someone come alongside them and walk them through each step the first time can be a blessing, taking away their anxiety associated with the unfamiliar.



#### **Try chunking**

Remember how their brains are stimulated? The long way. Because of this, introverts work best when they can invest large blocks of time into a subject or task, whether that means limiting their task list to one subject a day, or to two or three.

Be sure you give your introvert at least a 15 minute warning before they need to stop a project and move on to something new. That way their brains have time to refocus before jumping into a new task.



#### **Provide options**

This is probably the most important point of all. Introverts need freedom and options. Keep feedback flowing and make sure you understand how they're doing, but beyond that, let them tell you what works best and mold their education to those standards.

# *“Train Your Child in the Way They Should Go...”*

Proverbs 22:6 says *“Train up your child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”* (NKJV).

That applies to their education as well.

Foster an excitement for learning. The more excited they are to grow and expand, the better they will do in whatever future path they choose.

## *Homeschooling for Introverts*

Homeschooling is a *great* opportunity for introverts. The flexibility of homeschooling allows you to create a safe, nurturing environment that is *perfectly suited to your child's needs*.

## *Take advantage of that!*

Be adventurous, customize learning, and make it fun! You know your student best which means *you're* the most qualified person to take on the challenge of educating them the way they need to be educated.

## *What About High School and College?*

As your student gets older, you will likely not feel equipped to teach them by yourself. However, there are plenty of ways to train and prepare your student so they're ready to handle every aspect of the real world appropriately. For example, homeschool co-ops, online study aids, bi-weekly college classes, and CollegePlus are all great options!

### *CollegePlus*

At CollegePlus, we're all about customizability and individualized education. Offering support for both high school and college, we can pair your student with a one-on-one Coach who can help them navigate both the high school and college scene on their time in a way that works best for them.

We can help your introvert create a high school or college experience that combines all of these tips we've already shared with you, like:

- Self-direction
- Effort-based grades
- Chunking
- Individualized learning plans
- One-on-one coaching
- And small group activity

Have questions?

### *Talk to one of our Student Counselors*

to learn more about our flexible high school and college programs (and get some guidance for yourself) so you can have a clear plan for how you're going to tackle these more difficult learning periods



## *The Bottom Line*

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The most important thing you can do for your student in any phase of their life is **accept them for who they are.**

God made everyone uniquely, and while that can prove to be a challenge when it comes to narrowing down “the perfect” teaching method, remembering that fact can actually make the process ten times easier!

Enjoy your student for who they are and the rest will naturally follow.

*Don't worry.  
You'll do great!*

