



Shake Your Shyness

By Heather E. Schwartz

Shy girls have it tough.

You wish everyone knew how much fun you can be—but it's scary putting yourself out there! You can shake your shyness, though—others have. Would you believe that *Gilmore Girls* actress Alexis Bledel joined a drama class to help her overcome her shyness? *American Idol* winner Carrie Underwood and Academy-Award winning actress Julia Roberts have also said they were once shy. With a little practice, you can come out of your shell, too. Start with these tips...and get ready to see a more outgoing you!

Tip 1: Show off your smile.

A smile is the one language everyone understands, and you never even have to say a word. So even if you're feeling too shy to approach people, you can still encourage others to approach you. All you have to do is make eye contact and smile! Just by showing you're friendly, your smile will "speak" for you. Starting now, promise yourself that you'll smile at one new person every day. You'll brighten their day—and your own, too!

Tip 2: Ask "how" and "why" questions.

Get people talking about themselves and you won't have to worry so much about what you're going to say. Instead of asking questions that can be answered with a simple yes or no, ask questions that require some explanation. Start with "why" or "how" to encourage conversation. For example, instead of asking "Do you like playing soccer?" try "Why do you like soccer better than softball?" or "How did you get to be such a great soccer player?" A little flattery never hurts!

Tip 3: Be ready to talk.

Obviously, you can't plan a whole conversation ahead of time. But you can make some effort at being good company in any situation. Think about what interests you. If you like to read, look through a magazine or newspaper for interesting or funny stories to pass along. If you're excited about a particular issue, like animal rights or the environment, consider telling others about what you've learned. You could even memorize a good joke to tell. It's not always easy to come up with something to say on the spot. Be prepared and you'll feel a little more secure.

Tip 4: Practice on "safe" people.

Starting a conversation with the most popular girl in school or a boy you really like may be just too scary to consider. So practice on people who *aren't* so intimidating: your next-door neighbors, your little sister's friends, your Great Aunt May. Awaken your chatty inner self, and small talk will become easier and easier. And remember, getting in with the popular crowd or a particular boy isn't the only way—or even the best way!—to make friends. Set your sights on people you have something in common with, and you'll have plenty to say to each other.

Tip 5: Get involved.

Interested in anything? Of course you are! Join a club at school or volunteer in your community for a cause you care about. Feeling shy is a lot like feeling self-conscious. But when you're doing something you feel passionate about, you may be so into what you're doing that you forget to be shy. Plus, you'll be surrounded by people who share your interest, so you'll definitely have something to talk about.

Tip 6: Use props.

Onstage, props are everyday items used in a scene. In real life, certain props can help you beat shyness. A digital camera, for example, gives you a reason to chat with people you don't know at events like parties, soccer games, or dances. After you snap, share a look at the image, talk about the event, and ask others to take your picture, too. Books and magazines are also useful props. They give you something to do while you work up the courage to start talking to someone new. (And when you do, you deserve major props!)

Tip 7: Fake it till you make it.

Just because you're feeling shy on the inside doesn't mean you have to show it on the outside. Pretend you're an actress playing a role—and this time, you're playing the girl who's friendly and outgoing. You've seen her on TV a million times, right? She stands tall, walks confidently, looks people in the eye, says hi with a smile, and laughs easily...all things you can definitely do! And as a bonus, you'll develop your acting talents, too. You may even want to try out for the next school play!

Even if you try every one of these tips tomorrow, your shyness won't disappear overnight. Overcoming shyness, like changing almost anything about yourself, takes practice, patience, and time. But as long as you keep trying, you *will* get there. Along the way, keep visualizing yourself as the more outgoing girl you want to be. Eventually you won't need to picture that girl in your head to see her—she'll be right there in the mirror, smiling back at you!