

Parent Over-Dependence Survey *. . . Are You Too Close to Your Child?*

A Rate-Yourself Quiz for Parents of Six to Twelve Year Olds

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Being a parent is one of the world's most rewarding jobs and one of the most challenging because you have to make much of it up as you go along! If you're like most of today's Moms and Dads, you worry about how you are raising your child... if you're giving and caring enough. Surprisingly, caring too much can create its own set of difficulties for your youngster!

Psychotherapist Jonathan Berent, who specializes in social disorders, notes that developing a healthy sense of independence and confidence early in life paves the way for future success-particularly in social arena. He adds that much of this comes from participating in social activities early on, which helps kids learn how to get along with others, to take responsibility for actions, to think independently, and to solve disagreements and difficulties peers on their own.

By age six, children already have a strong need for friends. As they become older, youngsters' lives no longer center around parents and the home. While you may miss the young child who once depended on you for everything, encouraging independence is crucial! Continuing to think of a growing youngster as vulnerable and helpless can have a significant social disadvantage later on. By age 12 or 13 a youngster's life typically involves many social activities. Berent notes that a lack of friends and an overwhelming amount of time spent at home may signal a serious problem.

At a young age, some children already have established a pattern of shyness or discomfort in social situations. They may not be naturally outgoing or may have experienced peer rejection early on. Well-meaning parents often allow these children to avoid social encounters altogether and fill the emotional void with their own companionship and love because they care. This actually reinforces the child's shyness or a deeper related problem by rewarding social fear. It can set up a pattern of continued frustration and anger, as the child develops an ever-increasing inability to relate to others and make friends.

Check the following, which apply to you:

Agree Disagree

- I plan many joint activities, trips and entertainment with my child. He or she does not have a lot of time to play with friends.
- My child has always been shy, and as he or she becomes older, I find myself making more and more excuses for this behavior.
- My child never seems to follow through on promises to get together with other children.
- People who do not know my child well often think I am overprotective, but I am just helping him or her through a difficult time.
- My shy child's siblings sometimes complain that they don't get enough attention but the shy one needs me more.
- I am my child's best friend because he or she needs me.
- My spouse and I disagree on whether our child has a social problem and we often argue about it.

- My child frequently has minor illnesses, such as severe headaches, and misses a lot of school. However, the doctor says nothing is physically wrong.
- My social life usually revolves around my child.
- It is not appropriate for children my youngster's age to go to sleepover parties and eat over friends homes; they are too young.
- I choose most of my child's clothing because I know what is appropriate.
- My child has one close friend and that's all she or he needs.
- I often have to clean my child's room because otherwise it doesn't get done.
- I want to be involved with my child's social life and frequently volunteer to chaperon on school trips or social events.
- My child doesn't have any friends, but hi or she will grow out of it.
- I almost always know what's best for my child because I know him or her so well.
- My child doesn't spend a lot of time with other youngsters because he or she is more advanced than children of the same age.
- If my child is upset by a problem at school, I always call the teacher to discuss it.
- Money is no object when it comes to my child.
- My child has never been interested in giving a party because he or she does not enjoy being the center of attention.
- My child has frequent temper outbursts. I've found that doing something extra nice will help him or her feel better.
- My child refuses to go to summer camp. I don't mind because I like spending the summer with him or her.
- My child prefers to pursue his or her own personal projects rather than playing with classmates after school.

SCORING: Add up the number of statements that apply to you. Your parenting style encourages:

0-3 Independence and Socially Open Behavior

You love your child. And you are not afraid to give the freedom and responsibility that go along with it. It is likely that the two of you communicate well and trust one another. Continue with what you're doing right.

4-7 Mild Dependence

At times your child displays shy or timid behavior and tries to avoid social situations. By permitting this, you may be encouraging this shy behavior. Try enrolling your child in a club or after school class and insist that he or she regularly attend. Encourage involvement in group activities.

8-11 Moderate Dependence

Your child is more than just shy. He or she avoids numerous social opportunities and relies on you to fill in as a companion. Because so little time is spent with peers, he or she may not be developing certain social skills. Enroll your son or daughter in an extra-curricular course or activity. Do not give special attention to your child because he or she seems unhappy. Be aware that your child may be making excuses to avoid social situations, and develop a strategy to alter his or her behavior. Learn how not to enable the "compulsion to avoidance". If the situation does not improve, consider talking with a therapist.

12+ Extreme Dependence

Your child is having significant social difficulty. Don't ignore the problem. Usually, it will get worse over time. Look at the situation honestly. Are you making excuses for his or her behavior? Are you permitting your child to avoid normal activities because you don't want to see him or her upset? Have a serious talk with your child about the problem. The good news is that social fear is a learned behavior and can be unlearned. Establish goals and learn how to meet them. Consulting a qualified therapist is indicated.

Mild shyness often may be outgrown. But, more severe social anxiety or phobia can become a serious lifelong problem and at the center of both is often dependency on parents.

Ten Tips for Helping the Shy or Parent- Dependent Child.

- Acknowledge that your child has difficulties in social situations, whether mild or severe. Admitting this is the first important step towards solving the problem.
- Encourage your child to participate in extracurricular activities or enroll him or her in classes with built in opportunities for socializing.
- Suggest that your child give a party. Usually invitations are reciprocated.
- Visit adult friends with children and bring your child along. It's a natural non-threatening way to introduce him or her to others.
- Discuss with your child his or her feelings about shyness or lack of friends even though he or she may prefer not to talk about it. Other practical solutions can be implemented, such as taking an after school class or joining a club. It's up to you to set goals and to see that they are met.
- Consider your own behavior honestly. Make a list of any special treatment you may give your child because of his or her problem. These are usually actions that reinforce dependency on you. For example do you provide attention because he or she is lonely?
- If your child has frequent temper tantrums because of his or her problems. Do not give in. Let your child know what the consequences will be for misbehaving and follow through.
- Remember that both parents should be perceived as on the same team. If you disagree about your child's difficulties, do it behind closed doors.
- Bear in mind that growth occurs by learning to deal with fear and anxiety. Insist that your child participate in some of the social occasions he or she prefers to avoid.
- If the problem is severe, consider consulting a therapist. Generally, the situation will not resolve itself unless positive steps are taken.