

## Introduction

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We've all seen them—those people who seem to always be surrounded by admiring friends, gliding through conversations with grace and ease. It's almost like they were born with some social gift, giving them a natural place in the spotlight.

What do they know that you don't? What's their secret?

The answer is this: They're just as shy as you are.

Really, it's true. Everyone has some degree of self-doubt and fear when meeting new people, attending social functions, or speaking in public. The only difference is that some people have learned to overcome their anxiety and project an air of confidence, immediately putting those around them at ease—which, in turn, draws others to them.

Social confidence is a skill anyone can master, and it's easier than you might think. In this book, we'll present 51 easy tips and techniques to help you finally conquer your shyness and start embracing life.

## 1. Ask questions.

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When you're shy, even the most casual social encounter can be scary and overwhelming. Instead of struggling to come up with things to say about yourself, start by asking the other person questions about their life. Most people are more than happy to chat about themselves in detail, leaving you with the easier job of listening, nodding, and interjecting comments every now and then. You can ask about anything—their job, school, kids, or even their favorite movies or restaurants—and, before you know it, your questions will have led to a full-fledged conversation.

## 2. Remember one detail from every conversation.

Whenever you talk to someone, try to squirrel away at least one nugget of information, such as their plans to renovate their house, the name of their pet, or their upcoming travel plans. Next time you meet, you'll have a solid foundation for a follow-up conversation without having to break the ice all over again. Plus, the remembered detail will show the person that you remember them, which will make them feel special—a surefire recipe for a positive social experience.

### 3. Don't think about yourself.

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If you're talking to someone and all you can think about is "*Do I sound stupid?*" or "*What should I say next?*" or "*What should I do with my hands?*", the conversation will quickly come to a screeching halt. One effective technique is to think only about the other person, not yourself. Stop worrying about how you look and sound, and make a conscious effort to project the focus outward. Slowly but surely, you'll begin to feel more relaxed when interacting with others.

## 4. Take a compliment.

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This can be extremely difficult for those who suffer from shyness or anxiety, but learning to accept kind words gracefully is essential to boosting confidence and social comfort. If someone comments that they like your sweater, for instance, resist the urge to point out how old or inexpensive it is. When a friend comments on a recent accomplishment you've made, don't downplay your efforts or give all the credit to someone else. Before long, you'll realize how much easier it is to smile and say "thank you" rather than arguing the compliment away.

## 5. Introduce yourself.

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It may seem tough at first, but introducing yourself is much less painful than standing around at a social gathering while everyone else talks around you. There may have been a time back in high-school when rejection or ridicule were real threats, but it's very rare for adults to react with anything but kindness. Whether you find yourself surrounded by strangers or you come across an acquaintance you've only met briefly, it's perfectly acceptable to smile and tell them your name. Chances are you'll get a welcoming introduction right back, and will be well on your way to a new friendship.

## 6. Start a social log.

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A huge part of overcoming shyness is paying attention to even the simplest of triumphs. Every evening, take a moment to jot down your “social successes” for the day. Start small—maybe you smiled at a stranger on the street, or said hello to a colleague you don’t know very well, or asked someone’s opinion about a book they were reading. As your log grows, you’ll have a tangible, physical record of the progress you’ve made, which will motivate you to keep working toward your goal of leaving shyness behind once and for all.

## 7. Breathe.

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This may sound obvious—we all have to breathe, right?—but shy people often take short, shallow breaths when they’re in tense situations. Focusing on deep, regular breathing is a highly effective tool for calming social anxiety. Next time you find yourself in a stressful situation, take a moment to focus on your inhalations and exhalations, letting the air completely fill your belly and then slowly letting it all out. This will immediately lower your heart rate and blood pressure, relax your muscles, and clear your mind, making it easier for you to interact with others.

## 8. Give yourself a pep talk.

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Never underestimate the power of the spoken word. Before your next social event—whether it’s a job interview, party, public speaking engagement, or date with someone new—verbalize your fears and hopes. Talk to yourself about how you’d like it to go and what you can do to overcome your anxieties and make it a success. Practice asking and answering questions, rehearse key points, and concentrate on speaking slowly and deliberately. By putting your thoughts and goals into words, you’ll be more likely to make your ideal outcome a reality.

## 9. Slow down.

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Have you ever noticed that when you're in a stressful social situation, you tend to talk faster? This is probably because you want to finish what you're saying as quickly as possible to get the focus off of you and back onto the other person. Talking fast can actually deepen your social anxiety—not only does it emphasize your nervousness, it also increases the chances that you'll say the wrong thing. During your next conversation, focus on slowing down your speech and taking the time to think about each sentence before you say it. You'll find it easier to articulate your point and will get a more positive reception from your listeners.

## 10. Stand tall.

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Overcoming shyness isn't just about talking more—it also has to do with how you carry yourself. When you walk with your shoulders slumped and your head hanging down, you'll come across as aloof and unapproachable. On the other hand, when you enter a room with tall, straight posture, you'll project an air of confidence. Work on maintaining good posture by walking with your shoulders squared, your tummy in, your chest out, and your head held high. You'll earn the respect of those around you before you even say a word.

## 11. Let people know you're shy.

Many people seem to regard shyness as a taboo subject, but it's nothing to be embarrassed about. When you try to sweep it under the rug, you risk coming across as aloof and unapproachable. Almost everyone has some degree of anxiety in social situations. Putting a label on your shyness and using it to explain your behavior makes it much easier to handle. You'll be relieved of the pressure of trying to ignore or mask it, and others won't have to pretend not to notice it.

## 12. Reward yourself.

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The key to overcoming any obstacle is recognizing the small triumphs along the way. As you work on shedding your shyness, give yourself frequent pats on the back for the progress you're making. For instance, if you go out of your way to smile at a stranger or begin a conversation with someone, you might treat yourself to your favorite cappuccino or new book. You can tailor the incentive to match the size of the risk you've taken. These self-rewards will

help fuel your motivation and keep you from getting discouraged, even when your efforts don't immediately get results.

## 13. Practice one thing at a time.

There are countless social skills that can be learned, but it's not realistic to expect to master all of them simultaneously. You'll get the best results by focusing on one or two techniques at a time. For instance, you might start with

a resolution to smile at a new person every day, and then progress to saying “hello”. Depending on the difficulty of the social skill, it may take a day, a week, or even several months before you become comfortable with it. The key is patience and consistency.

## 14. Laugh.

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Laughter isn't just the best medicine—it's also a great ice-breaker. Shy people tend to resist laughing in public because they're afraid it will draw attention to themselves, but a little humor can go a long way toward thawing out an icy social situation. Next time you're talking with someone and they say something that tickles your funny bone, feel free to laugh—you'll likely be surprised at the positive reception. Laughter makes you seem fun, friendly, and approachable to others, keeping the conversation flowing and eliminating nervousness.

## 15. Sit in front

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Whether you're attending a concert, meeting, or seminar, it can be tempting to slip into the comfortable anonymity of a seat in the very back row. Next time you're attending a seated event, make it a point to choose a spot as close to the front as possible. Once you get past your initial nervousness at your new vantage point, you'll be surprised at how much more you get out of it and how many new people you'll meet by default. Taking the front seat also puts you in the perfect position to exercise the new social skills you're learning.

## 16. Practice in front of a mirror.

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Stand in front of a full-length mirror with your shoulders back, chest out, stomach in, and head held high. Making eye contact with your image, practice talking confidently to an imaginary friend. Don't forget the listening part—between comments, practice smiling, nodding, laughing, and maintaining eye contact as your “friend” talks. After several rehearsals, these communication techniques will begin to feel more natural to you when relating to others in social situations.

## 17. Don't try to be the life of the party.

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The key to overcoming shyness is taking baby steps—setting small, bite-sized milestones that can be realistically attained. Success isn't necessarily contingent on stealing the spotlight. In fact, if you make that your goal, you'll likely just get overwhelmed and discouraged. There will always be those people who seem to be surrounded by flocks of friends, but that doesn't have to be your benchmark. Strive to expand your comfort zone instead of stepping out of it completely.

## 18. Learn to embrace silence.

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Silence is often seen as a shy person's worst enemy. It can be tempting to try to fill it as quickly as possible, which usually results in a rambling monologue that feels forced and awkward. Instead, try to savor the quiet moments at social functions. Instead of feeling like you have to talk incessantly, focus instead on listening, observing, and smiling, being perfectly content to let the "life of the party" types take center stage. If you're comfortable and calm, your silence will actually earn you respect and acceptance—and what you do say will carry more weight.

## 19. Volunteer for a task.

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Next time you're attending a party or social function, offer to help the host by serving refreshments, decorating the venue, or cleaning up after the event. By taking on an "official" role, you'll keep busy and will feel less social pressure. Your assigned responsibilities will serve as a sort of buffer, making it easier for you to socialize with people without the pressure of a focused, one-on-one conversation. You'll also have an immediate ice-breaker topic to use with anyone who approaches you.

## 20. Work on eye contact.

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This is perhaps one of the most difficult skills for shy people to master, but it's also one of the most important. Eye contact is an essential form of non-verbal communication. When you look someone squarely in the eye while speaking to them, you're showing them that you're friendly, confident, and interested in what they're saying. If your gaze drifts to the floor, your watch, or other people, that gives the impression of boredom or disinterest. Try to make eye contact at least once during every sentence spoken.

## 21. Read the news.

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Whether you get it from the daily paper, news website, or TV program, it's important to stay up to date on what's happening in the world. Having a working knowledge of current events will give you a huge advantage in social situations. When someone brings up a timely topic, you'll be able to offer up informed commentary and opinions, instantly breaking the ice. And if you find yourself in a conversational lull, you can always lead with "Hey, did you hear about...?" Becoming a news hound could very well end your shyness streak.

## 22. Avoid talking about the weather.

Unless there's a huge blizzard, record-breaking heat wave, or other extreme climate conditions, try to avoid bringing up the weather. Leading off with temperature talk makes it seem like you're grasping for topics, and can end up feeling forced and artificial. That said, it's fine to include weather-related comments in context of another discussion, i.e. "All this snow has made for great skiing conditions! Have you ever been?" or "It's been so hot out...I'm thinking of joining a pool. Do you belong anywhere?"

## 23. Lend a helping hand.

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This may not be immediately obvious, but helping others can go a long way toward alleviating shyness symptoms. Whether you offer to carry groceries, serve refreshments at a party, or help a neighbor with car trouble, your active assistance makes a great buffer. You'll get invaluable practice in shifting the focus away from yourself and onto someone else, and the other person will appreciate you going out of your way to help. Even the smallest act of goodwill can boost your confidence and spark a conversation that could lead to a new friendship.

## 24. Practice visualization.

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Before your next social event, take a few moments to close your eyes and visualize yourself interacting like you've always wished you could. See yourself moving easily from group to group, participating in conversations, and smiling and laughing. As you visualize it, you'll watch yourself just as others would see you in that situation. After visualizing this in your mind a few times, socializing won't seem so foreign or scary, and you'll be much more likely to re-enact the imagined scene in the real world.

## 25. Know your triggers.

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While some people are perpetually shy in almost every situation, others have certain triggers that set it off. To help prevent shyness from kicking in, it's important to understand what causes it for you and then take measures to correct it or avoid those situations altogether. For instance, if you're not comfortable wearing a swimsuit in front of people you don't know well, it's probably best to skip the pool party in favor of a more modest event. If you tend to be bashful in the presence of a certain person, find out what it is about them that intimidates you and identify ways to get past it.

## 26. Approach other shy people.

When you're shy yourself, it's easy to spot the telltale signs in others: lack of eye contact, nervous fidgeting, and a general aversion to socializing, to name a few. Next time you're at a social function and you notice someone who's obviously struggling, make it a point to approach him or her, introduce yourself, and try to spark some small talk. You'll most likely find that it's easier to relate to someone who shares your same communication challenges. There will be less pressure on your end, as you'll suddenly find yourself in the "driver's seat" of the conversation. After trying this a few times, reaching out to others will become like second nature, whether they're shy or not.

## 27. Ask open-ended questions.

In an earlier tip, we recommended overcoming shyness by detracting the focus away from yourself and onto the other person. One of the easiest ways to do this is by asking lots of questions. But simple yes/no inquiries—like “Do you come here a lot?” and “Are you married?”—aren’t guaranteed to get the conversation flowing. Instead, stick to open-ended questions that force the other person to elaborate a bit more, such as “What do you like about this place?” and “How did you and your spouse meet?”

## 28. Make assertive statements.

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Lukewarm statements tend to get lukewarm reactions. When talking with someone new, try to speak assertively—this will help you earn the respect of others by clearly expressing your thoughts and opinions. For instance, instead of saying “I think I might see that movie,” you could say “I want to see that movie.” Or, instead of “It was a pretty good time,” say something like “I really enjoyed myself.” Using stronger, more definitive statements is great practice for adopting bolder everyday communications.

## 29. Don't be afraid to say no.

For those who struggle with social anxiety, high stress levels can make things even worse. If you load yourself down with too many commitments—personal or professional—it's easy to become overwhelmed, which can then impact your ability to interact with others. Make the necessary schedule adjustments to ensure that you have plenty of time to relax and decompress from the day's activities, so you'll be mentally recharged and ready to communicate.

## 30. Exercise.

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Although it may not be immediately obvious, regular physical activity can help you break out of your social constraints. Exercise raises your level of endorphins, clears your mind, boosts your confidence, and makes it easier to focus. Every day, set aside half an hour for a brisk walk, some basic yoga stretches, a bike ride around the block, or any other physical activity you enjoy. Not only will you feel better, you'll be in a better frame of mind for interacting with others.

## 31. Pretend you're not shy.

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Putting your confident self forward in public will be a lot easier once you've practiced in private. While at home, the grocery store, or any other location you feel comfortable, pretend as though you're oozing with confidence. Walk through parking lots with your head held high, and stride from room to room with a swagger in your step. Whether you're speaking into a drive-through speaker or answering your telephone, use a firm, confident tone. While

pretending may feel a bit ridiculous at first, practicing this behavior ahead of time will bolster your confidence for when you make your public unveiling.

## 32. Get social online.

Tap into the power of the Internet and get involved with social media websites like Facebook, Twitter, and My Space. Start a blog, contribute comments to online forums and bulletin boards, post a product or movie

review, ask or answer a Yahoo question, or share your favorite recipe on a cooking website. In addition to boosting your confidence, socializing online will allow you to pick up on conversation starters, news tidbits, and topics of interest to use for in-person social interactions.

33. Put your fears into perspective.

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In addition to tracking successes in your social log, it's also helpful to keep a written record of "worst case" scenarios. If an impending social gathering is causing anxiety, putting your feelings into words will help put your fears in perspective. What's the worst thing that could happen if you stammer, talk too fast, or forget someone's name? In all likelihood, you'll be treated with respect regardless of your delivery, and if you forget a name, you'll probably just get a polite reminder. Be sure to give yourself a pat on the back for recognizing that the bark of the social situations you fear is certainly worse than their bite.

## 34. Be a star.

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While some may define “star” as someone who has mastered a musical instrument or displays athletic prowess on the football field, perception is in the eye of the beholder. To a child, a star may be someone who can dribble a basketball or bake fantastic chocolate-chip cookies, and to an elderly person it may be a good listener or adept checker player. Embrace your opportunity for stardom by sharing your talents with others. Volunteer as a mentor or help an older person – not only will you enrich someone else’s life, you’ll also gain confidence. Talk about a win-win!

## 35. Look, listen, and learn.

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Watching friends or even complete strangers who carry themselves with confidence is a great way to pick up firsthand tips. Whether you're riding the bus on your morning commute, waiting in line at the grocery store, or dining with friends, always be on the lookout for displays of confident interactions. Did you overhear a cashier's casual conversation with a patron, or witness strangers in line passing the time with pleasant chit-chat? Take a mental snapshot of their body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions, and then practice these behaviors in private.

## 36. Put your best face forward.

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Looking your best will go a long way toward boosting your confidence level. While it's not always possible - or practical - to be coiffed, in full make-up, or dressed in your most flattering clothing, it's important to never skimp on good hygiene or personal grooming habits. Not only will you feel better, you'll also be more likely to strike up a conversation, introduce yourself, or accept a handshake or embrace.

## 37. Avoid getting “help” from alcohol.

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While alcohol may initially loosen the tongue and lower inhibition, it should never be used as a tool for overcoming shyness. You won't be at your best while you're intoxicated, and those who interact with you won't be meeting the “real” you. If you rely on drugs or alcohol to gain the courage to talk with others, you'll never develop the healthy social or emotional skills you need to make genuine connections with others.

## 38. Join a club.

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It's no secret that knowledge is a powerful tool, but did you know it also makes a great ice-breaker? When you join a club or attend an event that interests you, you come prepared with a built-in arsenal of open-ended questions and assertive statements. Conversations will be much easier when you have an interesting topic of conversation on hand. Explore your local library, community education resource, or county extension office for clubs or hobby groups, or utilize social websites like Facebook or Meetup to connect online.

### 39. Describe yourself in positive, simple terms.

If you stammer during introductions or clam up when someone asks, “So, what do you do?”, having personal descriptors at the ready will help smooth these awkward scenarios. To begin, brainstorm and write down at least 20 positive words that describe you, your interests, or your profession. Then, construct a few short, positive sentences using these descriptive terms. Practice them in front of the mirror or during your morning commute until your delivery comes across as smooth and unrehearsed.

## 40. Seize opportunities to connect.

When it comes to making social connections, the old adage “Practice makes perfect” certainly rings true. While on your morning commute, throughout your work day, or while running errands, look for opportunities to make eye contact and smile at others. Strike up casual conversations with strangers, and take advantage of the courtesy questions you receive throughout the day. The next time a clerk asks you if you found everything, respond with, “Yes. I’m, really looking forward to grilling those steaks,” or “Yes. I enjoyed shopping here today – the selection is outstanding.” Remember to keep your comments positive, maintain eye contact, and smile. Chances are your efforts will be reciprocated.

## 41. Look approachable.

Standing with folded arms, hunched shoulders, and down-cast eyes sends a signal to others: “Leave me alone!” Eliminate these body barriers and send signals of approachability by making a conscious effort to stand tall with shoulders up and chest out. Practice softening your expression and relaxing your hands and arms. Smile with your eyes, and use them to scan the room in slow, steady sweeps. Be mindful of self-comforting gestures, like twirling hair or fiddling with jewelry, as these convey preoccupation. Also avoid foot-tapping and other metronomic gestures, as these telegraph impatience and make others feel rushed. Practice in front a mirror, and before long you’ll master the art of approachable body behavior.

## 42. Get help from others.

While the thought of an acting class may bring fits of nervousness, it may be just the ticket for drawing you out of your shell. It's much more than rehearsing lines – you'll also learn how to maintain eye contact and to sharpen verbal and non-verbal behaviors. If an acting class is too far out of your comfort zone, try joining a Toastmaster's club. These clubs provide a supportive atmosphere for honing communication, public speaking, and leadership skills. Contact your local library or university to find out about acting classes or Toastmaster clubs in your area, or visit [toastmasters.org](http://toastmasters.org) for more information.

### 43. Be early.

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Feeling rushed or arriving late are surefire triggers for anxiety, so allow plenty of time when preparing for social gatherings. It's always easier to speak to a group of acquaintances than strangers, so try to arrive early so you can greet—or at least watch—the other guests as they arrive. Use the extra time to familiarize yourself with the layout of the room, assess seating options, and evaluate the placement of speakers, refreshments, doors, mirrors, or any other features that may interfere with your confidence.

## 44. Ask for introductions.

If you're at a social gathering where you already know some of the guests, asking for introductions can be a great way to break the ice and get the conversation started. Prime the pump by having your hand outstretched from a distance, and remember to make eye contact and smile using your eyes and mouth. Weave a few of the short, positive statements you've been rehearsing about yourself into the introduction, and then ask a question to keep the conversation flowing. Before you know it, friends will be approaching you to make introductions on their behalf.

## 45. Be your own best friend.

If you're shy, it's easy to have the tendency to beat yourself up – especially when you think you've made a blunder at a social gathering or meeting. Become your own supportive self-coach by exercising positive self-talk and forgiving yourself ahead of time for any mistakes you may make. Look into the mirror, smile, and vocalize your goals for the day. Then, step into the role of a best friend and help yourself reach these goals. Over time, you'll find that your positive outlook become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Remember to celebrate the successes – no matter how small – along the way.

## 46. Start with friends and family.

The good news is, those closest to you already know that you're shy; what's even better is knowing they love and accept you unconditionally. Use the great relationships you already have to help break out of your shell. Practice starting conversations, asking questions, and maintaining eye contact with family and friends, and look for opportunities to spend more time out in public together – even if it's only to eat dinner or run errands. After you've mastered social situations with those you feel comfortable around, you'll be ready to venture out into unfamiliar territory and strike up conversations with new people.

## 47. Take baby steps.

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While presenting a speech or leading an important meeting at work may be on your list of goals, it's okay to start conquering your shyness on a much smaller scale. Begin listing the situations that cause social awkwardness, and then arrange these in order of the level of anxiety they incite. Start small by asking for directions to the restroom in a department store, then gradually move up by striking up a conversation with a stranger, introducing yourself to a new person during lunch, or volunteering to help at a meeting or social event.

Revisit the steps until you've mastered your confidence level, and be sure to congratulate yourself along the way.

## 48. Keep it real.

While you may have to “fake it until you make it” by pretending you're not shy or by demonstrating body language that feels unnatural, remember to never lose sight of your true personality. While laughter is a great ice-breaker, refrain from laughing at a joke or comment that you find offensive, hurtful, or

one that you just don't think is funny. Also, don't try to impress with facts, figures, and jargon, or by using big words or trendy phrases that aren't part of your typical vocabulary. Remember, the idea is for others to get to know the *real* you!

## 49. Have an open mind.

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An open mind starts conversations much easier than a closed one, and a non-judgmental attitude will keep the conversation flowing. While you should never compromise your own beliefs, developing a sense of tolerance will go a long way toward easing you into social gatherings with grace and panache. While you're becoming well-versed with current events, broaden your scope to include a few topics that wouldn't otherwise interest you. Seeing something from a new perspective will not only broaden your comfort zone, but you'll also be perceived as more approachable to others.

## 50. Put an end to “all or nothing” thinking.

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Don't expect to conquer your shyness in one fell swoop. It's important to understand that you can never control the actions or reactions of others. While it's great to gently push your limits and venture outside of your comfort zone, don't brand yourself a “failure” if you didn't meet all of the social goals you set for yourself. Breaking out of your shell isn't an exercise in right and wrong; rather, it's a series of infinite gray areas. Recognize that each step you take, regardless of how small, puts you one step closer to your goal, and greet each stumble along the way with a smile.

## 51. Ban negative self-talk.

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Do you find yourself saying things like, “Other people just aren’t interested in what I have to say,” or “I’m sure I’ll say something embarrassing, so I’ll just keep quiet.” Put the kibosh on negative self-talk by replacing it with positive affirmations. Tell yourself that you’re worthwhile and that others will welcome and appreciate your viewpoints. Develop a positive affirmation mantra, such as, “I’m pleasant to be around. I’m friendly, receptive, and am a great listener with a lot to say.” Start and end each day by saying your affirmation out loud in front of the mirror, and repeat at least twice throughout the day.