

family



JERRY CAMMARATA
FATHER'S DIARY

Don't limit your child's growth by teaching habits of shyness

I have a budding 8-year-old who I have referred to in a recent column as being a dare devil in gymnastics. She'll try anything, even without a protective mat. She is almost ready for competition now and I know she will win lots of gold medals.

But just the other day it was like pulling teeth to get her to do some routines for several aunts and uncles that were visiting. She was shy. She made all sorts of excuses why she couldn't, including having to go to the bathroom. Her shyness was momentary, however. By offering my assistance, I persuaded her to do just one easy cart-wheel. With the sound of applause and cheers from the family, well, I just moved away and she took over the floor.

My daughter's sudden shyness made me think a little about kids who are shy—really shy. All of us are shy at one point or another. We may have feelings of temporary inadequacy. But in short order we get over it and reach for the stars. Some of our kids, unfortunately, never get over their shyness and eventually succumb to a number of behaviorisms that reduce their effectiveness as social beings.

If your child is shy or you want to know more about the subject, secure one of the newest books on the market, "The Shy Child," (McGraw Hill, 1981) by Philip G. Zimbardo. Dr. Zimbardo is the director of the shyness clinic at Stanford University and has conducted pioneering research on shyness for over seven years. He has treated the information in his book in such a way that the lay

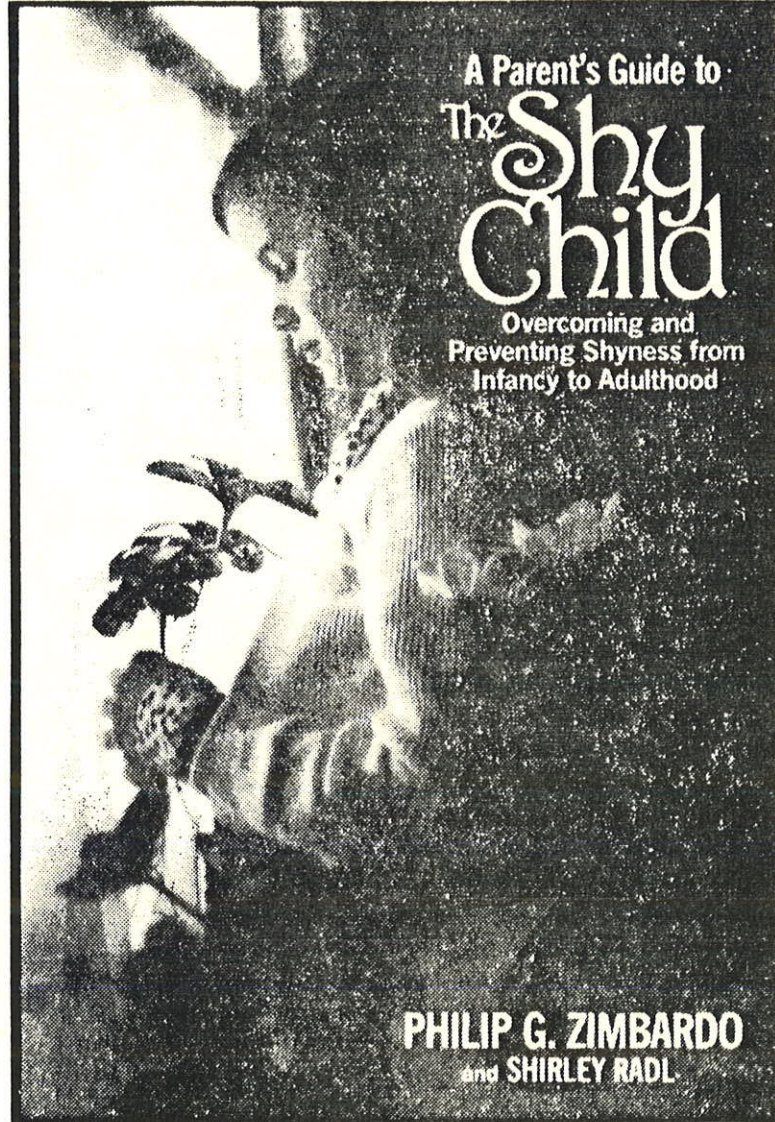
person can understand the significance of shyness and what to do about it. He describes how to create a home environment most likely to build confidence and self-esteem in your child, from preschool through college age.

You may be interested in knowing that parental expectations can have an important bearing a child's "shy" factor.

Think about yourself. Are your expectations too high or too low? Could my expectations of my daughter and her gymnastics be too high, to the point of inducing her shyness? "The Shy Child" is getting my questions answered.

I've discussed labeling a child more than once before in my writings. Zimbardo reconfirms the detrimental effect labeling has on a child when he or she repeatedly hears such phrases as "You're stupid" or "You're worthless." Accordingly, the author states, "Sticks and stones may break their bones but labels last forever." The bones will heal but the wound caused by verbal lashes can penetrate a child's self-image and scar it for life.

Zimbardo provides us with an other interesting insight worth mentioning here. Kids, being social beings, need to interact and play with others. Often, they don't have the conversation skills needed to gain access to a group; so they may retreat and try some other way of gaining entry. Very typically, a kindergartener paces around a play area, sits down and starts playing alone. This routine can and does very often backfire, causing the child to feel rejected.



This, in turn, can lead to shyness.

It seems to be a good idea for parents to help their children learn communication skills to be able to share their inner feelings.

If you haven't already encountered shyness of your child, you will when he or she gets involved with the opposite sex. It is a traumatic experience and sometimes not even words can arrest the anxiety and awkwardness felt. Zimbardo explores this situation in depth

and provides you with diagnostic and treatment strategies.

Give all you can to your children. Your unselfish dedication will have its dividends. Make your child verbal, inquisitive, a searcher of the unknown and an exceptional social being. If you're unsure as to how you will go about accomplishing your goal, read some good literature. I feel I am a better parent for having read "The Shy Child." I know you will agree after you read it.