

# Hecht: Some kids are quiet, others are chatterboxes. Sometimes they're both.

Pam J. Hecht, Special to WNC Parent Published 5:00 a.m. ET Sept. 30, 2019



Pam J. Hecht (Photo: Courtesy photo)

I was sitting next to my 4-year-old daughter at a staff lunch meeting some years back, when an unenlightened and rather impudent fellow parent at the table asked me, "Does she talk?"

My daughter, loud and lively but shy with strangers, heard the question (and the tone), of course, and looked down at her plate.

I wanted to fling my Cobb salad-hold-the-bacon-please at her, but I did the grownup thing instead, because I am forced by society to do so. I told her that yes, she is quite well-versed in the art of verbal communications, and left it at that. Which was a good thing, because the woman was my boss and I didn't want to be fired.

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Still, the memory rankles me. If I could go back in time, I'd respond with a scathing come-back or at least, surreptitiously drop salad dressing on her shoe. I'd also point out that even the most verbal and friendly kid can clam up around a cluster of adults.

Shy kids can get the shaft. Some of them itch to be heard.

## Confidence takes time

During one of my acting classes, one child commented that another child was, "the quiet one in our group." (She was also the most well-behaved and respectful. Go figure.)

"I am not quiet," she fiercely countered. "I am really a very loud person."

I wasn't surprised. At home, her parents probably have to pop in ear plugs for a little peace and quiet.

Meanwhile, by the end of that term, her stage whisper had turned into audible words and during the class performance, the audience even heard some of them.

Some kids take longer than others to find their confidence and voice in the outside world. I was so quiet at school, that when I finally brought home a naughty note for being a blabbermouth, my mother threw a party. When the next note came home, I asked for a pony. (Unfortunately, that was pushing it.)

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One brilliant childhood friend hardly uttered a word until he hit elementary school. People were alarmed. Several years later, he was regularly busted in high school Spanish class for talking too much in two languages.

### **Quiet isn't a negative**

Meanwhile, being on the quiet or private side is not a negative (unless it's social anxiety, rather, and gets in the way of normal activities, self-esteem or general happiness.) In fact, these reserved folks typically have a ton of wonderful qualities, like self-reliance, deep thinking and empathy.

They just may need approach situations at their own pace and in their own way, which is fine, as long as it doesn't mean giving others the stink eye. One way to torture these types is to have them practice interacting with new people by ordering in a restaurant. Remind them to speak up so they don't end up with pea soup instead of pizza. Give a shout-out when they do well with a new friend at a playdate or a party.

Above all, don't try to change them. Especially since their subdued nature may mean less shenanigans at school and more peace and quiet at home.

We don't all need to be social butterflies or the life of the party. And with everyone lovingly gazing down at their cellphones like zombies, it can be hard these days to spot the soft-spoken, anyway.

But if someone notices your kid is quiet and dares to criticize, have a bottle of salad dressing handy and be prepared to use it.

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