

The major difference between extroverts and introverts is how they gain energy.

Here are some things you should know about me:

- I find large gatherings overwhelming. A little goes a long way.
- I find social banter boring, but love a deep one-on-one conversation.
- It takes time for me to figure out my opinion. While that is happening I might appear to “go away.” My face might become blank, I might look off to the side, I might become very quiet.
- I get my energy in solitude, by thinking, meditating, and just being quiet. For me, being alone is not only an exquisite joy, but necessary to my health.
- I am at my best doing one thing at a time. If I am given multiple overlapping tasks, I feel scattered and irritable.
- If I am interrupted while focused on a task, it is like having to rise to the surface of a deep pool, and it is hard (if not impossible) to return to my concentration. This, too, makes me irritable.

What makes introverts and extroverts different?

The major difference between extroverts and introverts is how they gain energy.

Introverts gain energy when they are alone, and are able to spend time in the inner world of the mind.

Extroverts gain energy by being out and about, interacting with others, and having new experiences. They usually find time alone under-stimulating.

What is the difference between shyness and introversion?

Introversion (like extroversion) is a biologically based dimension of personality. Like the color of your hair, it is part of a person’s physical makeup. The introverted temperament is self-reflective, and is energized through solitary pursuits.

Shyness stems from the fear of what others think of you, and can lead to extreme self-consciousness. ***Both introverts and extroverts can experience shyness.***

How can I tell if I’m an introvert or extrovert? Can we do anything to change our temperaments?

There is no such thing as a typical introvert or a typical extrovert. We all fall within a continuum— from extreme extroversion to extreme introversion—and where we fall can change from day to day, and year to year, depending on the situation.

Everyone will have times when they are exuberant and outgoing, as well as times they need to pull back and reflect. This is not being “out of character.” Nor does it mean that you have switched temperaments.

Think about what depletes you, and what energizes you.

If a group activity tires you, you are probably an introvert. If a group activity energizes you, you are probably an extrovert.

If you become energized by being deeply focused on a solitary task or hobby, you are probably an introvert. If you feel understimulated when alone, you are probably an extrovert.

There are also online tests you can take which will help determine your temperament.

Isn’t it better to be outgoing and sociable?

Our culture definitely favors outwardly focused, sociable traits, and introverts suffer considerably for failing to fit the norm. Introverts are labeled shy, taciturn, inhibited, anti-social, self-absorbed, cold, uncooperative, and unfriendly. These labels are untrue and reflect a prejudice reinforced by our culture. However, like any other prejudice, education can begin to correct this injustice.

Introverts bring their own strengths and gifts to any relationship, organization, or endeavor, such as focus, depth, and a measured pace that prevents burn-out. They are loyal friends and enjoy rich, loving, intimate, and long-lasting relationships.

Many artists, writers, and scientists are introverts. Had Albert Einstein been a social butterfly, we might still be waiting for his Special Theory of Relativity.

Why are introverts so quiet?

Actually, introverts talk just as much as extroverts. The difference is, most of this talk goes on inside their heads. This self-talk is how introverts process information. Only after their thoughts are formulated is the conclusion conveyed to others.

For extroverts, however, self-talk involves the mouth. Most extroverts process information by talking with others. For this reason, you could say extroverts think with their mouths. Others not only hear the conclusion, but the entire process leading to it.

What determines introversion and extroversion?

There are 3 factors that determine temperament:

1. **Brain chemistry: Dopamine vs. Acetylcholine.** The neurotransmitters that produce a feeling of well-being are different for the extrovert and introvert.

Extroverts have a low sensitivity to dopamine, and need adrenaline to produce enough dopamine to feel good. That's why they seek thrills and adventure, and are energized by time spent in the outer world.

Introverts have a high sensitivity to dopamine, and too much results in over-stimulation, stress, anxiety and exhaustion. Their biology is geared to produce the neurotransmitter acetylcholine, which is produced by thinking and feeling. That's why they seek peace and quiet, and are energized by time spent in their inner world.

2. **Genetics.** The relationship between dopamine and a gene known as D₄DR is believed to be another component of personality differences. High novelty seekers have a long D₄DR gene, and need excitement (adrenaline) to produce dopamine. Low novelty seekers have a short D₄DR gene and are highly sensitive to dopamine.
3. **The route blood takes through the brain.** Blood travels through the introvert's brain via a different, and longer, route than the extrovert's brain. This longer blood route goes to parts of the brain engaged in remembering, planning, and solving problems. It also goes to the "speech" area of the brain, which indicates ongoing self-talk or inner dialogue. The blood flow of the extrovert goes to the parts of the brain engaged in sensory processing.

Some tips for interacting successfully with your introvert:

1. Listen to your introvert. Believe what he or she tells you. You don't need to understand it. You only need to believe it.
2. Ask your introvert what he or she is thinking about, or projects he or she is working on.
Rules of interaction:
 - a. Make eye contact.
 - b. Ask the question.
 - c. Maintain eye contact while the introvert responds. If you fidget or let your eyes wander, your introvert will assume you are making polite talk, and are not actually interested. The result will be a superficial exchange that will die quickly. Sit, focus, ask, listen, and respond. Converse deeply. If things go well, this is when the introvert can become chatty indeed.
3. When your introvert says "no" do not argue with him or her. Do not roll your eyes, sigh, or ask for an explanation. By the way, "I don't want to" means "no."
4. Do not pressure for an immediate answer to a request. Suggest that your introvert think about it overnight.

How can I help my introverted friend become more outgoing?

If this issue is still of concern to you, please read this brochure again. Your introverted friend is perfectly fine, just the way he or she is.

This brochure was written by Jane E. Harper, and is taken from *Our Undiscovered Gems: Tapping the Resources Introverts Bring to the Bahá'í Community*. Publication pending.

Also by the author: *The Universe Within Us: A Guide to the Purpose of Life*. May 2009, Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette.

I'm
not
shy

I'm introverted

and it's perfectly normal...