

Knowing Your Introverted Self

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When we live in a society that favors extraversion, it can be a real challenge being an introvert. As introverts, we are constantly told that we're too quiet or don't say enough. When we are young, we are told we need to speak up in class and participate in a school club. When we get older, we're pressured into being "go-getters" at work as well as partyers on the weekend. If we don't, then we are seen as weird or unsociable. This can take a heavy toll on even the most outgoing introvert.

As a young girl, I struggled a lot with being introverted and shy. It took me a long time to realize what exactly made me feel different from most of my peers, but I eventually realized that I was an introvert. Knowledge really is power. And thanks to being able to read and talk about introversion, I can now understand myself and use my introversion to my advantage. I've realized that there is nothing wrong with me—and if you're an introvert reading this, there is nothing wrong with you, either.

Whether you're an introvert or extravert, we all find ourselves somewhere on the introversion–extraversion spectrum. However, few people are completely introverted or extroverted; most who consider themselves an introvert or extravert are only predominantly one or the other. Individuals who feel like they fit in-between these groups are called ambiverts, someone who is both an introvert and an extravert. Knowing where you measure on the introvert–extravert spectrum can be really beneficial for you. It can explain situations such as why, when you think you're an extravert, you suddenly don't feel like going out with your friends, even though you had previously promised you would. Or, when you think you're an introvert, why you feel bored and anxious on your own at home. When you know the reason for

your feelings, you are able to understand yourself better and how to live your best life with your personality. And who doesn't want that?

Through discussions with friends, I have been able to educate both them and myself on something they might have felt confused about. Most people know the gist of what these terms mean, but they haven't thought about applying it to themselves. My extraverted friends are not all completely extraverted and have not understood why they feel like being around people can be draining at times. They might think they're down or sad when really they just need to go home and recharge on their own for a bit. It can be hard to understand *why* you don't want to see your friends after work when you don't know your needs. Even as an introvert, I still need company sometimes. It's just not as often and for as long as others because it tires me out pretty quickly.

Taking the Myers-Briggs test and reading about the nature of how I personally function changed my life. And though I don't think we should rely too much on the information we get from it, it has definitely given me a deeper understanding of myself. I now have the tools to take my introversion in stride and use it to my advantage. However, I also believe that we are more complex than cookie-cutter definitions; we shouldn't align ourselves with only one type throughout our lives.

My advice to you, wherever you find yourself on the scale, is to educate yourself on this topic. It will give you insight into how not just you, but other people as well, function. If your friend goes quiet when meeting your colleagues, it's easier to understand why they seem so uninterested. They could be an introvert. If you know they're observing and taking everything in, you could step in and help them out. Similarly, just as you are able to understand others, you must not be so hard on yourselves. Just as you'd forgive someone for not showing up to your

party, others will forgive you for doing the same. They know it's not personal and that you need to rest after a hectic week. Being around people five days a week is hectic for an introvert—no wonder we need the rest.

It all comes back to communicating your needs. Some people find it hard, but being able to say that you simply need to go home and be on your own for a bit without feeling bad is one of the greatest reliefs for an introvert. I can't count how many times I've felt like I may have disappointed someone for choosing to take care of myself and rest. The other person might not understand my reasons for it unless I explain that I'm an introvert and what that means. Conversely, I also know when to really put in the effort to attend an event with a friend. Thanks to knowing myself better, I can prioritize and mentally prepare so that I don't feel too overwhelmed. It's a lot better than spending time trying to come up with excuses not to go.

We introverts don't mean to be mean or selfish. But to an extrovert who doesn't know or consider our introversion, it can come off as pretty rude to always decline invitations. They're inviting us to a party because they think they're fun and want us to join in. However, they don't realize the pressure it puts on us, and how our thoughts will spiral before the event. Thoughts of the large groups of people there, how to strike up meaningful conversations with strangers, how long you should stay, and excuses to use in order to *not* go in the first place run through our minds. It becomes difficult to appear (not that you were to begin with) calm about going to that party.

Don't ever be afraid to tell people you're an introvert. Know what's best for you and maybe inform some people about it along the way. Spread the word. To be able to survive the pressures of an extraverted world, we have to be able to stand up for ourselves. We must make it

socially acceptable to live our lives true to our introverted selves. It's the only way we can be genuinely happy.