



# The Gifted Introvert

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Western civilisation today is dominated by the extravert viewpoint. This is because extraverts outnumber introverts 3 to 1, are more vocal than introverts and are more understandable than introverts. However, while introverts are a minority group in society, they form the majority of gifted people. Moreover, it appears that introversion increases with intelligence so that more than 75% of people with an IQ above 160 are introverted.

Introversion and extraversion are personality types: two complementary ways of operating in the world. The extravert's main interests are with the outer world of people and things while the introvert is more involved in the inner world of concepts and ideas.

People have both introversion and extraversion in their personalities and so are not limited either to the inner world or the outer world. But they have a natural preference for either introversion or extraversion rather like a preference for right or left handedness. People show a preference for the world in which they operate best, their inner world or the outer world. The preference can be slight or quite marked. This ordinary human behaviour can not be labelled right or wrong, nor can one way be judged better or worse than the other.

Introversion is a way of operating in which a person is more comfortable in their own inner world and draws strength from it. Well developed introverts can deal competently with the world around them when necessary, but they do their best work inside their heads, in reflection. Similarly, well developed extraverts can deal effectively with ideas, but they do their best work externally in action. For example some of you reading this can't wait to get to the practical applications: you are looking at it from the extravert's standpoint. Other readers are more interested in the insights that will help them understand themselves and human nature in general: you are seeing it from the introvert point of view.

The introverted attitude is one of caution, reserve and reflection. For introverts, meaning comes from within and anchors their sense of reality. In contrast the extraverted attitude is one of immediate response, adaptability and involvement. For extraverts, meaning comes from outside and is reinforced by engagement in activities, relationships and events. The anchor for their sense of reality is external and their sense of vitality is directly proportional to their participation in the outer world.

The main difference between introverts and extraverts is the source of their energy. Extraverts get energy from people and objects outside themselves whereas introverts gain energy from within themselves.

Extraverts will tell you that not only do they get energy from outer world interaction, they find it demanding or draining to be thrown back on their own inner world too much.

Introverts will tell you how demanding and draining it can be to be continuously exposed to the outer world e.g. see how long introverts can last at a bright, sociable party: they can summon up goodwill for a while but soon begin to wilt and can usually then be found sitting quietly on their own.

A second major difference is that extraverts have a single layered personality; they tend to be the same in public and in private whereas introverts have a public self and a private self.

**Essential differences between introverts and extraverts are:**

<b>Introverts</b>	<b>Extraverts</b>
Get energy from inside themselves	Get energy from interaction in the outside world
Real world is the inner world of ideas, understanding and meaning	Real world is the outer world of people and things
People of ideas and abstract invention, difficult to understand, often shy	People of action and practical achievement, easy to understand, often sociable
Have a public and private self	Are the same in public and in private
Intense and passionate, tend to bottle up emotions	Expansive and less impassioned, unload emotions as they go along
Feel drained by people, need privacy	Feel energised by people
Have a few close friends	Make lots of friends easily
Quiet in large groups, fear humiliation	Outspoken in groups, take risks
Can concentrate intensely for long periods	Can be distracted easily
Mentally rehearse before speaking, need time to make decisions	Think out loud, make decisions quickly
Learn by observing, live life only when they understand it	Learn by doing, understand life after they have lived it
Go from considering to doing and back to considering	Go from doing to considering and back to doing

In the general population there are approximately 3 extraverts to every 1 introvert. This can lead to the assumption that extraversion is better: an assumption that can be an obstacle to the development of introverts. Introverts need to be very sceptical of the assumption that infrequency or difference is inferiority. If they do not have a healthy scepticism, they will not trust and exercise their introversion and so it will not be developed enough to be beneficial in life.

The ablest introverts use their extroversion well but they never try to be extraverts. They learn to deal competently with the outer world without placing too much importance on it. They value their own way of being and derive an unshakeable orientation to life from it. Introverts have an inherent continuity in themselves, an independence of the momentary outward situation. Outer conditions and situations vary continually but the inner self is far more constant.

As their focus is on the inside, introverts often seem detached from outside events. A useful aspect of this detachment is that the absence of encouragement does not affect them very much. If they believe in what they are doing they can work happily for a long time without reassurance. Such behaviour does not make sense to most extraverts who are only sure whether or not their work is good when they know what other people think of it.

Extraverts direct most of their energy and attention towards the outer world. They understand the world through acting and reacting to it; they need to externalise things in order to understand them. They tend to learn by trial and error and generally like a faster pace than introverts. Extraverts also tend to like work involving multiple contacts with people and face to face, fast paced activities.

Introverts focus on the inner world. They understand the world through careful contemplation and prefer not to act or respond without thoughtful consideration. Introverts will take in information and perhaps ask a few clarifying questions. They will not frequently interrupt with questions and comments as most extraverts are prone to do. Introverts need time "to digest" information before responding to it. Usually introverts appreciate some time to consider information before being asked questions or before the personal relevance of the information is discussed.

It seems easier to overload an introvert with too much information than an extravert. Introverts may prefer a slower paced discussion and care should be taken to solicit feedback from highly introverted person to make sure information has been understood.

Introverts generally chose work where they can function independently or one-on-one, with enough time for careful reflection before acting. Extraverts prefer a high level of social interaction with a wide variety of people. They tend to have many friends and acquaintances. Introverts are just as capable as extraverts of enjoying friendships and working with people, although they tend to chose their friends more carefully and they prefer to work with people individually rather than in large groups.

Introverts have marvellous powers of concentration and are able to ignore many of the distractions in the outside world. Introverts are likely to go deeply into their work and are reluctant to call it finished. When they do display their work they tend to give only their conclusions, without details of what they did. This brief communication saves them from potentially overwhelming external demands on their time and energy and allows them to return quickly to another uninterrupted stretch of work.

Introverts' energies are powerfully directed by their ideas. They characteristically pause before action. This pause, often called hesitation by others, gives them time to study and classify a new situation so the action taken will make sense in the long run.

Extraverts solve their problems by talking about them to other people. This is part of the externalisation of their thought processes. They sort their thoughts through verbalising them. Introverts, on the other hand, rarely talk to others about their problems. They go over and over them in their minds; often until they feel they are about to explode. If they are finally driven to seek advice that is exactly what they want: advice. They don't want to talk about it or think about it any more; they just want solutions.

Introverts read more than extraverts partly because it is a socially acceptable way of gaining some needed time alone. Introverts need time to reflect, time to let emotions settle down before they can talk about them, time to ponder possible solutions to problems. If you need to discuss an issue with an introvert, raise the matter and then postpone discussion for at least 24 hours to let the introvert have time to think about it.

Family members are likely to have differing preferences for extraversion or introversion. Tensions can develop when the introvert is in the minority in the family; where the prevailing family climate is set by the predominant extraverts. The introverted daughter or son in a family of extraverts, for example, may learn to be more extraverted to keep up with the rest of the family but also must find time alone, perhaps through reading in his or her room.

However, car trips or other situations in which s/he can't physically get away may remain difficult. Family members can learn to appreciate each other's differences and make needed accommodations. The family can learn to hear their introverted son or daughter's need, and maybe their own as well, to slow down the pace a little.

Family vacations are often a trying time as they can magnify differences in personality preference. It is wise to take preferences into account in planning a holiday together so that each member can feel comfortable. In order to develop fully children need both individual and shared leisure interests. One way that children develop their own personalities is to choose freely some leisure interests of their own. Families that demand too much togetherness don't allow this development process to occur.

Society, parents and teachers do try to turn introverts into extraverts. However, they need to understand that there are no right or wrong ways of functioning but simply differences. Introversion is perfectly normal and does not need "curing".

As introversion is a personality type, it is no use waiting for your child to grow out of it or expecting your partner or yourself to change into an extravert. This may be more socially acceptable but it is an impossible task.

Parents need to appreciate personality differences and understand that they lead to differences in points of view. Using this understanding they can foster communication so that explanations of personality both affirm and challenge their children.

Parents need to provide opportunities for their introverted children to develop and give them peace and privacy. It is also vital to understand the importance of maintaining their confidentiality. Introverts have a deep, inherent need for privacy, they get embarrassed easily by either public censure or praise and they need time to consider and reflect.

If parents understand and accept their childrens' introversion, the children have a spot of firm ground to stand on and a place in which to be themselves. But if children suspect that their parents want them to be different - to go against their introversion - then the children lose trust and confidence in themselves.

When parents are accepting of their childrens' introversion, their children will be able to learn how to extravert when necessary because they know that they are always free to be introverts.

Although children are far more vulnerable, even adults can have their faith in their own introversion undermined by the beloved person who does not understand or accept it.

More than anything introverts need respect for their introversion; they need respect from others and to respect and accept themselves.

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