

**NEWS! NEWS! NEWS!****Gwenn Gelfand**

### The Introverted Camper

Last February, Susan Kain's book *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World*

*That Can't Stop Talking* was released and stimulated renewed interest in introversion.

She informs us that "at least one third of the people we know are introverts." They are the ones who prefer listening to speaking and reading to socializing. According to Marti Olsen Laney, neuroscience researcher and author "one of four prefers to avoid the limelight, tends to listen more than speak, feels alone in large groups and requires lots of private time to restore their energy." Dr. Laney explains introversion as a hard-wired temperament rather than a disability. Introverts are hard-wired from birth to focus inward. Outward stimulation often becomes overwhelming. People often view introverts as shy or aloof or anti-social. They are generally content with one or two friends and often perceived as unpopular. Parents and other caretakers and institutions often fear that they are unhappy and maladjusted. Research shows the contrary. It concludes that these children are highly intelligent both emotionally and academically, are creative, introspective and in touch with their own feelings. Introverts enjoy their own company, often feel overwhelmed when interacting with others, and need time alone to regroup. These children have often been misunderstood and made to feel and believe that something is wrong with them.

Extroverts, on the other hand, are usually very talkative, outwardly confident, take charge and think out loud. Introverts need time to process thoughts and make decisions while extroverts are generally quick with making choices, answering questions, or responding to demands. Extroverts recharge themselves by being with many people, participating in many activities, and through external stimuli. Yet, the increased popularity of texting gives support to the idea that in our overly extroverted society people need non-face-to-face interaction as well.

When we think of camp we often envision the chanting of color war cheers, singing of camp songs, excitement of inter-camp games, and the numerous social activities and events that camps provide. But what about the introvert at camp? Where does this camper fit in and how can camp owners, directors and staff help to assure these campers a rewarding and comfortable summer?

Creating a climate of acceptance and tolerance and recognition of differences in people is critical. This helps to prevent bullying of introverts who are often perceived as vulnerable and become prime targets. Research advises not forcing introverts to mingle or make small talk and to accept that they do not feel comfortable doing this or find value in it. In short, steer away from trying to change the introverted camper, instead finding ways to accommodate them while at camp. Highlight unstructured time – rest hour, free play, electives – and emphasize these times as opportunities to be alone if one chooses. Include options like yoga or meditation in an activities schedule as these prove to be beneficial to many campers both introverts and extroverts. Since introverts are comfortable on the internet, any computer-related option offered at camp should be supported and encouraged as well. Research highlights allowing these campers time to think before answering questions or making decisions as spontaneous decision making is extremely challenging. Giving introverts a chance to speak in groups and encouraging expression of opinion is helpful. It is often difficult for introverts to contribute when extroverted campers are present. Research studies also show that transition periods and interruption from activity are difficult for introverts. Giving ten minute warnings about a period or activity ending may help ease this situation. And, finally, we need to continue to check our expectations and assumptions. Acceptance, not attempts to change the child, is recommended.

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