

A vertical composition featuring a person's silhouette on the right side, standing against a background of a sunset or starry sky. The sky transitions from a deep red and orange at the top to a dark blue and black at the bottom. The person's silhouette is dark and occupies the right third of the frame, with their hand visible near their waist. The text 'INTROVERT SURVIVAL GUIDE' is centered in the middle of the image in a white, serif font.

INTROVERT SURVIVAL GUIDE

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance.....	9
<i>Myers-Briggs Type Indicator</i>	10
<i>Overlap with Other Issues</i>	12
<i>Coming to Terms with Who You Are</i>	14
<i>Boundaries</i>	15
Finding Your Voice – and Using It	18
<i>Memory Retrieval</i>	19
<i>Tips for Addressing On-the-Spot Requests</i>	20
Assertiveness.....	24
Prefacing.....	26
<i>Use I-Language</i>	27
<i>Say No If You Mean No</i>	29
<i>Making a Request</i>	30
Self-Care	31
<i>Be Honest</i>	33
<i>Nutrition</i>	33
<i>Gentle Movement</i>	36
<i>Self-Soothing Techniques</i>	36
<i>Let's Review Important Points:</i>	37

Introduction

Many of us are surprised to find later in life that we are introverts. This is particularly confusing for those who are outgoing and socially skilled.

How did we miss this all our lives? Aren't introverts the shy, socially awkward people who dislike going out or being among other people?

The introvert revolution has shined a light on a lot of misinformation and lack of information about us. However, the stereotypes of introverts as wallflowers, computer geeks whose only interactions are online, and crazy cat ladies still abound.

For one, **not all introverts are shy**. Some of us are, but not all. And we don't all choose to spend time with our cats instead of people, though some do.

So, who are we and what makes us who we are?

- 30 – 50% of people are introverts.
- Introverts get their energy from time alone, rather than from social stimulation.
- When we spend too much time socializing, we need alone time to recharge.
- We prefer to spend time with small intimate groups and relate to others on a deeper level.
- We don't want to be extroverts – or different from who we are – most of the time.
- Some social situations are stressful because of the small talk and need to "be on" – not because of social anxiety – though some have social anxiety.
- As introverts, we enjoy solitary things like gardening, reading, being in nature, and similar pastimes.

- We may spend a lot of time "in our heads" imagining or thinking of things that seem more interesting than what is happening in the outside world.

These traits don't make us any stranger than extroverts. Some people find it odd to strike up a conversation with strangers or spend time in loud, crowded places where a conversation is impossible.

Introverts or extroverts are not right or wrong – simply different. Research shows that it is possible to determine by four months of age which children will grow up to be introverts. We're born this way.

With these differences in our wiring, our needs and care may be different from others. Our relationships are generally deep and intimate. Our social circle may be small but relatable.

Our work lives may be solitary. It doesn't mean that we aren't team players, but that we do our best work in an environment that allows us to dive deep into our thoughts and

create without additional stimulation and distractions.

Let's dig deeper into the world of introverts. You'll discover much more about:

- Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance
- Finding Your Voice
- Assertiveness
- Self-Care

“I'm an introvert... I love being by myself, love being outdoors, love taking a long walk with my dogs and looking at the trees, flowers, the sky.”

– AUDREY HEPBURN



Self-Awareness and Self-Acceptance

It is exhausting to force yourself to be different from your "natural" way of being.

How many of us have tried to make ourselves be more extroverted - feeling like a round peg that does not fit the square hole?

And for what? Because we think that is what others expect or desire? And if they do, so what? There are plenty of other people who fit the bill and other opportunities that don't require exposing yourself to stressful situations on a regular basis.

Don't get me wrong - most of us can learn the skills to be a good speaker, actor, or leader. Many choose to be or find themselves thrust into roles that are out front - in the spotlight.

In fact, a lot of people you think are extroverts because of their ability to "be on" may be introverts. **It's what happens when**

they're not in the spotlight that tells the true story.

For example, consider a Dean of a graduate program who does public speaking twenty or more times a year and happens to be one of the best networkers around. They're socially fluent and the life of the party.

But when it is over, they need a few days to decompress and refuel. It was not until the "introvert revolution" that they realized that they're an introvert – despite their skills and abilities.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Those of a certain age grew up thinking the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#) (MBTI) was the gospel. The MBTI was developed in the 1940s by Katharine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers.

Kendra Cherry of Very Well Mind says:

“The [extraversion-introversion](#) dichotomy was first explored by Jung in his [theory of personality types](#) as a way to describe how people respond and interact with the world around them. While these terms are familiar to most people, the way in which they are used here differs somewhat from their popular usage.

Extraverts (also spelled extroverts) are ‘outward-turning’ and tend to be action-oriented, enjoy more frequent social interaction, and feel energized after spending time with other people. Introverts are ‘inward-turning’ and tend to be thought-oriented, enjoy deep and meaningful social interactions, and feel recharged after spending time alone. We all exhibit extraversion and introversion to some degree, but most of us tend to have an overall preference for one or the other.”

It is the energy source that makes the difference. Do you prefer social stimulation or solitary time enjoying your inner life?

There are varying degrees of sensitivity to the "electrical charge" in the environment. Some of us are easily overstimulated when there's a lot of noise, people, lights, or frenetic energy.

The stimulation can be draining and the time to recharge may be longer than for others.

Even if you have highly developed coping skills, **minimizing exposure to situations that feel chaotic may be the best strategy for those who find it overwhelming.**

Overlap with Other Issues

There is a lot of overlap between introversion and other issues – many that are mental health conditions. **It's important to recognize that these conditions are not specific to introverts**, and as our theme goes, stereotypes do not apply to any one group across the board.

- **Anxiety/Social Anxiety.** Those with social anxiety are easily overstimulated in social situations, similar to introverts. However, not everyone with social anxiety is an introvert. Anxiety has a strong genetic component, in addition to environmental and familial.
- **Highly Sensitive People (HSP).** Elaine Aron has been researching this phenomenon for a few decades. She believes that HSP are both introverts and extroverts, so there may be some crossover.
- **Empaths.** Empaths are sensitive to the energy of others and often say that they take on that energy. In those cases, they may become overstimulated and require downtime to recover.
- **Depressives.** Depression and mood swings have a complicated etiology that we don't totally understand. Both are believed to have a biological component, as well as cognitive, psychological, and social. Anyone can

have depression – regardless of personality type.

- **Neuro-Cognitive Disorders.** People who have damage to the frontal lobe often report the inability to filter out external stimuli, which results in feeling overstimulated and may require time to recover.

Coming to Terms with Who You Are

There's nothing wrong with working behind the scenes. Let someone else be the "front-person". There may be negative consequences, like limited work opportunities in some fields, but **your wellbeing is far more important.**

Many of us grow up in households where others are more extroverted and encourage us to loosen up and let our hair down. No doubt they are well-meaning – and have no clue what they are suggesting that we try to accomplish.

Boundaries

Now that the secret is out about introverts, we are equipped with more ammunition to educate those who don't understand.

First, we must educate ourselves - learn more about our differences and come to terms with those. If you're miserable at college football games, don't go. It may mean that you miss out on some of the fun, but you can find alternatives.

If the game is televised or streaming, invite some people over to watch it at home. Perhaps you don't even care about the game, but like spending time with friends who like to go to the games. Find other ways to connect with them.

Most introverts prefer small, intimate groups with those they know well for social activities. Plan events for those you enjoy spending time with, doing something you all enjoy.

If you don't like people in your private space (home), go somewhere quiet. Maybe a restaurant with outdoor seating would work for you. Being outside with more air to breathe and less noise may make it tolerable. Or go at less busy times, like after the lunch crowd and before happy hour.

It may be hard for family and friends to accept your new boundaries. Learning to do what works for you and avoiding situations that cause you discomfort may be necessary.

You could still be pressured to go places and do things that are outside your comfort zone. And you may choose to participate in some situations that are difficult because of the occasion. In those cases, **prepare yourself and plan downtime after the fact.**

We are who we are – and that means accepting and making peace with it. Everyone has to do this to some degree. If you want to be a basketball player but you're only 5 feet tall, you may have to find an alternative.

Our differences are invisible, so it's even more difficult for others to understand. If they are important to you, **help them respect your needs** – even if they don't fully appreciate why.

“I would admit I'm an introvert. I don't know why introverts have to apologize.”

– BILL GROSS

Finding Your Voice – and Using It

There are varying degrees of introversion – let's say mild, moderate or severe for lack of better word choices. For those who are on the more severe side, it's important that you learn how to prevent being overshadowed by others.

Regardless of your “level” of introversion, your knowledge, skills, and competence likely rival that of anyone else. So how do you shine when you dislike (or despise) the spotlight?

Here are three tips to help you find your voice:

1. Introverts generally do better 1-on-1 than in a group due to overstimulation.
2. Introverts often have trouble thinking on their feet due to challenges with

word retrieval.

3. Introverts communicate better in writing than verbally, as writing allows them time to think things through.

Since 1 and 2 are true, 3 is a given.

Memory Retrieval

It's interesting to learn that **introverts are more likely to reach for information in long-term memory than working memory.**

Retrieval from long-term memory usually takes more time and requires an association to find what we're looking for. There is some speculation that because introverts are deep thinkers, reaching into the depths of long-term memory makes sense – searching for information stored in the recesses of our minds.

Tips for Addressing On-the-Spot Requests

We're often accused of over-thinking things with a tendency to analyze them from every direction. Admittedly, that can take a while.

Meanwhile, what are we to do when put on the spot, or at times when responding in writing is simply not possible – say a request from a co-worker or job interview?

For spontaneous discussions that require a response, you might say:

- “Let me think about that and get back to you.”
- “I can't remember off the top of my head. I can email you with that info later.”
- “Hmmm, I would need to think about that.”

- “For some reason, I’m drawing a blank. Let me get back to you.”
- “I’m not sure. I’ll need to check on that.”

If you have trouble remembering things, **let others know that you should receive important information or requests by email.**

Don't count on your working memory to store information for later. It is not an unrealistic request to make, especially at work.

For more formal encounters like a job interview, these ideas may help:

1. **Go on the offensive.** Say up front that you need time to think about things, so it may take a bit for you to respond. It’s better to own it than let others wonder what the issue is.

2. **Think about situations ahead of time.**

What feels comfortable for you to say without "oversharing" details? For example, you could say, "I like to think about things before giving a response – I hope that is okay/you are okay with that."

3. **If you're feeling nervous, you can also say that.**

Make it an offhand remark but be genuine. Some people think that this makes them look weak. By mentioning it, the person is more aware and generally tries to make the process less intimidating.

- Practice what you'll say before you get there. Rehearse something like, "I am feeling nervous/anxious about our interview. I hope it will get better as we begin talking."

4. **If you're unsure or need more time to consider something, just say so.**

Avoid underestimating the importance of being a reflective person.

Many jobs require (and employers prefer) someone who thinks things through before responding. **It really is a strength**, as long as you don't convince yourself otherwise.

To be more confident in these situations, you may want to revisit the information about self-awareness and self-acceptance. Do what you're good at instead of trying to squeeze yourself into a role that doesn't work for you.

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Tell people if something they ask of you is not your thing. They will respect you for being honest and confident enough to speak up.

Assertiveness

Once you find your voice, it's important that you use it for good. Many introverts are seen as passive if they freeze up or are unable to find exactly what they want to say.

Everyone has a communication style that is their default. The good news is that most people can learn to be more assertive.

Being assertive is about saying what you mean – directly – without apologizing or downplaying it. You can preface your statements with something softer and then be gentle but firm with your comments or questions.

“If you ask an introvert a question, wait until she thinks about it. Introverts think before speaking, not through speaking. If you want to get to the good stuff, you need to slow down.”

– LAURIE HELGOE



Prefacing

Prefacing is a way to begin a discussion that prepares the listener for what is to come.

- "I want to bring up some things that are difficult for me to talk about – give me some leeway, please."
- "This is not easy for me to say, but I want to be as clear as possible."
- "It's difficult for me to verbalize my thoughts at times – bear with me."

Be concise. As a deep thinker, it may be tempting to over-explain things or "go deeper" than necessary or appropriate.

It can be awkward to stop short of all you want to say. Just know that less is more, and people can ask questions if they want details.

Write out what you want to say. Read through it and choose one bullet point for every section or paragraph. Organize your

thoughts succinctly and be aware that details may be requested.

- "I am going to give you the highlights and let you ask for any details you'd like to hear."
- "Here's the short version – please ask me anything you want to know."
- "I will keep it brief initially and then answer your questions."

Use I-Language

Be careful to state your comments and questions using the word "I." This helps reduce defensiveness, unlike "You" language.

- "I'm curious about..."
- "I want to ask about something you said earlier."
- "When this happens, I feel..."

- "I feel/think/want ... What are your thoughts about this?"
- "I need a response by tomorrow morning."
- "I will not accept an incomplete report."
- "I want to ensure that we are on the same page about..."
- "I am only interested in..."
- "I would like to see this outcome..."

If there is a deadline, be clear about it:

- "I would appreciate it if you could get the trash out by 8 AM."
- "I need this by 9 AM Monday morning."

Say No If You Mean No

It can be hard to say no. But it is even harder to commit to something that you can't or don't want to do.

Find a way to say no that feels comfortable for you without over-explaining. Let them ask for more information if they want it.

- "That is not possible."
- "That doesn't/won't work for me."
- "I'm not comfortable with that."
- "I can't commit to/agree to that."
- "I would rather not..."

Making a Request

When making a request be clear about it and stop talking. You may want to ask if they agree to it but leave it at that.

- "I would like for you to put away the tools in the garage. When can you get that done?"
- "I want you to make it a priority to be on time for meetings."
- "I would like to be consulted before decisions are made about this project."

Self-Care

Make wellness your priority. This means before, after, and during your day. Decisions about what and when to do things should be made with your wellbeing in mind.

There will be times when others will be disappointed or even angry about some of the decisions you make. Come up with a response to their questions and/or accusations that you can live with.

Make exceptions for things you really want to do, but have a plan for coping and an exit strategy.

You may decide to attend the party of the season to see friends and catch up.

Think about these things ahead of time:

- What do you need to do before you go in order to be most comfortable? Eat a

snack? Meditate? Spend the afternoon in quiet time? Some people find a glass of wine before the event takes the edge off. Only do this if it is safe for you – no drinking and driving.

- What area of the house/restaurant/club is most comfortable for you? **Stay outside if that's a possibility** – it's usually much less overstimulating.
- Think of those who are easy to be with and stick close to them.
- If the music is loud, go to a different room.
- Plan to leave after a certain period of time – whatever seems comfortable. You can extend your stay if you feel up to it.
- Don't force it. If you decide not to go at the last minute, send regrets and let it go.
- **Plan for recovery time.** It may be the next morning, day, or weekend –

whatever works for you to take care of yourself.

Be Honest

Those who care about you may understand your needs. Give them the benefit of the doubt. Talk to them and help them understand.

If you ask for their support, you may be happy to learn that you get it. Tell them you prefer smaller, quiet gatherings. Ask them to accept your invitations and understand that you may not be able to attend the bigger events.

Nutrition

There is some speculation that introverts, particularly those who are highly sensitive, may have food sensitivities or food allergies. This only serves as "one more thing" that makes us different from others.

Additionally, there's a strong link between food and mood, so it may be helpful to gain insight into those correlations. A food and mood journal is a great way to track changes in mood and any patterns that connect with food. You may need more than an app to keep up with the details of your day.

There are dozens of online food and mood journals - some that are free. Or grab a notebook and pen and begin documenting.

It's helpful to note the following each day:

- **Sleep** – how long and quality
- **Food** – meals and snacks for the day and times of each
- **Mood** – morning, noon, and night – and any situations that affected your mood
- **Energy** – morning, noon, and night

- **Pain or Other Symptoms** to monitor – what, when, severity 1 (low) – 5 (high)
- **Medications** – Over the counter and prescription medicines, including time and dose unless for daily use

[Julia Ross](#) has researched and written extensively about food and mood. Some of her work has been about addiction and eating disorders, but also sensitivities, allergies, and the mood connection.

For those who are concerned about reactions to food (or alcohol), it may be helpful to see a nutritionist. It would probably be hard to find one that could recommend the perfect introvert diet, but they may be able to assist in eliminating foods that are not good for your delicate system.

Some introverts report being overstimulated by caffeine, alcohol, and some foods and drinks. Not to belabor the point, but **it is probably better to avoid things that cause a negative reaction in your body or mind.**

Gentle Movement

If pounding the pavement to play tennis, basketball, soccer, and the likes feels like punishment, do something gentler. **Yoga, tai chi, and other gentle movements are good for the body, mind, and soul.**

Dance is also a great way to keep your body healthy and fit.

Self-Soothing Techniques

- Journaling
- Meditation
- Breathwork
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Take a bath
- Go outside
- Read
- Take a nap
- Get a gentle massage
- Play an instrument

- Listen to music
- Slather on soothing lotions or creams
- Rock or swing
- Sing
- Dance
- Write or read poetry
- Do puzzles
- Be silent
- Color, draw, or paint
- Talk to a friend or loved one

Let's Review Important Points:

- Learn as much as possible about yourself and educate others.
- Be yourself and don't try to force yourself to be different.
- Practice self-acceptance and remember you are who you are and that's okay.

- Consider how your introversion makes you a better person, friend, and family member.
- Understand the difference in overstimulation and anxiety - cope accordingly.
- Accept your specific needs and honor them.
- Set good boundaries and do what works for you instead of going with the crowd.
- Contemplate and practice ways to respond when you are put on-the-spot.
- Learn to be assertive to say what you mean and ask for what you want.
- Prepare for and practice concise discussion to avoid oversharing.
- Let others know your limits and ask them to respect your boundaries.

- If food sensitivities or allergies are an issue, see a nutritionist.
- Find gentle ways to include movement into your day.
- Practice self-soothing techniques.

Remember, as an introvert, you have many awesome qualities! Take advantage of these qualities and love who you are!

“I'm an introvert. I get my energy by spending time alone. I need that hour or two to myself every day.”

– AMIT BHATIA

