

How To Be Less Quiet And Contribute To Group Conversations

Many people know what it's like to often hear others remark that they're quiet. Most often this comes up in group situations. If you don't say much during a one-on-one meeting it usually just leads to the conversation ending. However, when they're with a bunch of people someone can sit back, not say anything, and let the others carry on the discussion.

There are a couple of facets to being quiet. The first is whether the quiet person feels it's an issue they need to correct in the first place. Two people may outwardly not say much in groups, and get the quiet label, but have totally different thoughts and motivations. One may be quiet because they desperately want to be able to speak up and contribute, but they're too anxious and inhibited to do so. They may feel ashamed every time someone points out how silent they are. The other person may feel there's nothing wrong with sitting back and being more of a reserved observer. They may resent it when someone blurts out how quiet they are, and feel misunderstood when people think being less talkative is some sort of flaw that needs to be cured.

The other consideration is how much of a practical problem being quiet actually is. I think it depends. Among some groups they may not really care if some of the members are less talkative than others. They still like them and consider them friends. Maybe they wish they'd sometimes chip in and show more of their personality during conversations, but that's it. Among a different type of social circle the more quiet members may be seen as awkward, or as dead weight, or everyone may wonder why they're even hanging around the group if they never seem to want to talk to anyone. They may end up being overlooked when it's time to organize future get togethers.

I also think being quiet is more of a potential liability when you're just meeting a new group and want to make a good impression, or just any kind of impression, on them. If you hang back too much people may not outright dislike you, but they'll come away thinking, "I don't know what to think of them. They didn't really say anything the whole time." You may want to spark more in them than indifference.

This article will mainly focus on how to be less quiet from the perspective that the untalkative person sees it as an area they want to change. I'll briefly mention the second scenario, of someone who's fine with being quiet and just wants to not get slack about it, at the end as well.

Give yourself permission to be quiet

I'll start with an overarching principle. A lot of people psych themselves out when they try to be less quiet. They put pressure on themselves to say something, and if they don't they get more and more self-conscious and hard on themselves about it, which just makes the problem worse. Take some of that pressure away by permitting yourself to be quiet. If you can think of something to say, great, but if not that's okay too.

Tell yourself that you have to say something every so often

You may be seen as quiet whenever you don't chime into a conversation as much as people expect you to. To counteract this may have to talk more often than it feels like you do. One thing that I find helpful is to make an explicit rule in your head that you have to say something at least every few minutes, preferably more. If not, people may perceive you as quiet. It seems basic, but if you spell it out like this, it forces you to continually try to add new points to the discussion. If you aren't conscious about needing to contribute, the default behavior tends to be to hang back and listen to everyone, and take everything in, but

sometimes go ten minutes or more without uttering a word. Or you can get lost in your head and get distracted by your own thoughts and daydreams.

When you're new to a [group of people who all know each other](#), this rule especially applies. The onus is often on you to get yourself into their conversation. They may all be comfortable with each other, and benignly neglect to more actively include you.

Making little contributions is better than remaining totally mute

Often in a group conversation other people will have the floor and no one expects you to completely take over and speak as much as they are. In this case you can still seem engaged by adding smaller statements. Things like:

- "Yeah, I heard the same thing"
- "Ha ha, you're right. He does do that."
- "Yeah, totally."
- "You're kidding!"
- "No way."
- (Just laughing when it's appropriate, as opposed to being completely silent)
- (Just making little noises that show you're listening, like "Ohhhh" or "Hmmm")

Maybe you're not taking center stage and wowing everyone with a witty story, but you're still showing you're in the middle of things. If you're more inhibited about speaking up, these mini-contributions are also a good way to slowly ease yourself into saying more down the road.

Even if you're not talking, appear to be tuned into the conversation

If several friends are chatting at a pub there's a big difference between someone who's not talking, but they're clearly attending to the discussion (by leaning in, looking at the speaker, making an effort to hear them over the background noise, nodding along, and having an interested expression on their face) vs. someone who's obviously mentally checked out and in their own world, or who looks bored and like they'd rather be somewhere else. One set of behaviors sends the message that even if the person isn't talking right that second, they're part of the conversation. Even though they're not technically saying much, people will be a lot less likely to consider them quiet. The other set of non-verbals says the person is uncomfortable or doesn't care about the others, even if that's not what they mean to communicate.

This point is also practical in the sense that if you make an effort to tune into the conversation, you'll have less mental energy to devote to fretting about how quiet you're being. You'll also be more able to pick out snippets of dialogue that give you an idea of a thought you could contribute.

Learn the unwritten rules of loud, lively conversations

Many people have a much easier time holding their own in smaller, orderly groups. When you add more people to the mix, and everyone starts talking at once, they have a harder time putting in their two cents. They'll default to being quiet because they don't have the skills or mindset needed to act any differently.

Take the lead in the conversation if it's not going your way

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In some cases people will be quiet because the people they're with are discussing something where they have zero to add, usually because they know nothing about the topic. If that goes on too long, then they're suddenly the quiet one through no fault of their own. If the conversation isn't going your way, you could try taking the lead and switching it to an area where you'll naturally have more to talk about.

More generally, if the other people are talking among themselves, and aren't making an effort to include you, you should take the initiative and try to work your way in there. There's no rule that says you politely have to wait for someone to directly address you and ask your opinion on something. I'm talking about when, say, two friends are gabbing about a movie and not turning to you to get your take on things. Of course, I'm not saying you should obliviously force yourself into more personal or private discussions.

You're likely to be more quiet around certain groups than others

Someone who comes across as withdrawn and tongue tied at a family dinner may be boisterous and confident while playing video games with their friends. Quietness can be very dependent on the situation. It tends to pop up if:

- You're around people who make you uncomfortable, whether because you're meeting them for the first time, because you want them to like you, or because you're normally [intimidated by their type](#).
- As I mentioned earlier, when the discussion is generally focused on a subject you don't have much to say about (e.g., a group of people are all discussing the minutiae of a sport or TV show you don't follow at all)
- Similarly, when you're around people who all know each other well and who are carrying on a conversation full of in-jokes and references to things they've all done in the past, or to mutual friends of theirs you don't know. It can feel challenging to inject yourself into that dynamic.
- When you're with a group where everyone is particularly loud and aggressive about fighting for their time to talk. You may decide you can't compete and give up on trying to say anything.
- When you're with a group of people you feel you can't relate to. They may be enthusiastically discussing a topic you don't respect, or cracking each other up over a bunch of jokes you don't see the humor in. Here it's easy to sit back and think, "Wow, I have nothing to say to these people. Do they really find this stuff fun to talk about?"

In some cases you may be in a spot where anyone would be quiet if they were in your shoes.

If you do come off as quiet, do better next time

You can't win them all. It's not rare for people to be quiet occasionally, especially around a new group of people. For some traits it's hard to erase a first impression of them, but coming off as quiet isn't one of them. People instinctively understand that some of us are bit slow to warm up to new company. If you're more chatty when they next see you they'll realize you're not meek, or unfriendly like they may have first assumed, and that you're actually a pretty interesting person to have around.

What can you say if someone comments that you're quiet?

Online I often see people expressing their frustration at being called quiet all the time, and wondering what the best way to respond is. They get particularly annoyed if the person calls them quiet in a "funny" way, like, "Whoa, I can't hear myself think from all the chattering Mark is doing" or "Oh my God, you said something! I didn't know you could talk!" I get the

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sense they're often looking for some witty retort that will put the insensitive, intrusive commenter in their place. That or they feel flustered and singled out when their quietness is noticed yet again, and they want a good way to explain themselves.

I think the first thing to keep in mind is that when people point out that you're quiet they usually don't mean anything malicious by it. They may be guilty of blurting out their thoughts without considering the effect their words will have on you, but they didn't have a hurtful intent. They find your quietness curious. Or they may have trouble taking on another person's perspective, and think that because they have an easy time being talkative, that anyone who isn't speaking must be choosing to be that way. Some people take another's quietness personally, and think they're deliberately being aloof. Overall, people sometimes saying dumb things is an [annoyance](#) we all have to put up with.

My take on the situation is that there isn't a perfect response for this situation. If you say something cutting like, "Why am I so quiet? Why are you so loud?", you'll look bitter and like you're over reacting. If you try to explain yourself too much, it comes across as unconfident. I think it's best to just be comfortable with yourself and acknowledge the comment in a matter of fact way, and then move on from it. You could say something like, "Yeah, my style is more to sit back and listen" or "Yeah, I don't know much about this topic, but you guys seemed to enjoy talking about it, so I didn't want to interrupt and try to change the subject" or even "Yeah I can be like that sometimes. I don't always realize I'm not saying much."