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## Understanding Your Introverted Teen

By Nancy R. Fenn

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For most of my life, I've felt hopelessly weird," said Heather, an introvert in her early thirties. "Like I don't really fit in. I've learned how to fool some of the people some of the time – there are those who swear I can't possibly be introverted – but I know better. Solitude and reading time are like oxygen for me; and too much time spent with other people (especially talkative sorts) is draining."

Heather struggled with being an introvert in her teen years and has been coming to terms with it more as a young adult. She's not alone. Being a teen can be stressful and even more so for introverts, who have to withstand all the social pressures of a typical high school day which are exhausting to introverts and of no intrinsic value.

For some of us, high school was a long time ago! We can understand the needs of introverted teens better and support them in growth on their own terms by going back for a moment to look at the high school years and the demands that are made on teens beyond the academic.

Most high schools are set up to please extroverts, who are the majority of the population 3:1. Introverts may find a typical day overcrowded, over stimulating, noisy, oppressive and stressful. The lunch room seems to be a particularly awful experience. Introverted teens suffer from an almost total lack of privacy as well.

We decided to get asked a group of introverts how they felt about high school. Here are some replies.

1."High school was better than grade school because there was more individualness to the curriculum. I remember wanting to be alone at lunch time, even though I had friends to sit with, but there was no excuse to get away from people. Sometimes I'd go to the library to pretend to work on projects in the quiet, or I'd walk in the halls (I went to a huge school) and pretend I was walking somewhere, just for a moment alone."

2."Hated it. It was noisy and there always seemed to be an element of danger in the air. The teenage stage of human development is probably the most dangerous. If teens had access to nukes, we'd all

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be doomed! LOL."

3."Loved high school. Gave me a greater opportunity to be a nerd. Loved carting all those books around. Instead of getting my books from my locker as I needed them, I got all the books I'd need first thing in the morning and get rid of them as I no longer needed them. If there was homework assigned for a class, I carried that book all day, and usually got through all the homework before I actually had to take it home."

4."I liked studying and reading but I did not interact with my peers because by that age, everyone seemed to have made up their mind that I was much too different and weird so I remained alone."

5."I can't say that I did like it – it was really just a job to me. I needed to get great grades because there

was no money for college. So I tracked myself into the academic side and wound up in Honors and AP classes. I became Editor of the newspaper which was a big deal since the paper had a tradition of winning a lot of regional and national journalism awards. I edited the literary magazine, helped with the yearbook, and did a lot of debate. Basically, if I thought it would look good for college I did it if it wasn't completely horrible like the Prom Committee. Teachers liked me. Other students just ignored me. I had some friends and I dated guys who went to other schools. Really any social life I had involved kids who were high academic achievers both in my own school and at other high schools. We all knew each other from debate, chess club, academic competitions or whatever. Frankly, probably more than half of these kids were introverts so there wasn't a lot of pressure to conform to a "peer group". A lot of the normal stuff of high school just flew under my radar. I couldn't get involved in the status dressing thing – no money. I couldn't get involved in the drink or drug until you puke thing – no money, looked stupid. I couldn't get involved in the high end sex thing – pregnancy would have absolutely ended my college ambitions. So I stayed out of trouble and had a fairly okay time."

6."High school was fine. I had a small group of friends, but preferred to be alone on the weekends. I was always "the quiet one" in the group."

7."I hated high school with a passion. I should have been home schooled. I was too sensitive and introverted to be thrown into the lions den. My elementary school never really prepared me for studies like geometry and I had parents that were busy and too permissive. So not having the help I needed to get over my math learning disability (discaculia) I rebelled with drugs to escape the pain of having to socialize and study."

8."I hated the immaturity of the other students. They made other student's business their business and I thought that was not only immature but antisocial and destructive. I hated high school because it didn't address the complete person. I wanted to know the map of the human psyche. I wanted to learn about human behavior and take it apart under a microscope."

9."Please tell me it gets better from here. I'm still in it, if that clarifies anything. I hate everyone here. No, I mean everyone. There's maybe a few people I don't altogether hate, but only a few. It's pretty depressing really, being surrounded by 2000 kids my own age and I can't make a single friend. Oh well, college will be better. Hopefully..."

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10. I was a band geek and an AP English student. I think I ate in the cafeteria once for lunch the whole three years of high school, because I could never find anyone to sit with and it was easier to starve than go sit in there. Eventually I got to hang out in the band office during lunch. Did theater and speech team and French Club and the Literary magazine. Never had any really good friends though until the last year."

Now you've heard it from the horse's mouth. Introverted teens find little value in extraneous socializing. Homeroom, clubs, dances, prom committees and most of all the dreaded lunchroom are annoying and exhausting to introverts. When they get home, the favored activity is reading or other quiet pursuits.

The exception may be academic clubs which tend to contain more intelligent students. With a rise in intelligence, the ratio of introverts rises as well. Studies have shown that the proportions almost reverse themselves among Rhodes Scholars and Phi Beta Kappas. Many of the more academic groups and committees are run by and for introverts and can be satisfying to participate in.

Introverts also prefer private projects (art, creative, musical instrument) and will often choose to pursue

these in their time off.

Some introverts are comfortable with their personality type even in high school. We were struck with those who made the best of it, humorously or otherwise, but we personally identified with those who walked the halls for a moment of privacy and who didn't eat because they couldn't handle the dynamics of the lunch room.

When your introverted teen gets home, he or she may need time alone to fill back up again. In fact, one of the greatest gifts we can give an introvert of any age is a room of their own with a door that closes!

Let's take a look at what some of the introverts on the survey said they liked to do when they got home from high school every day. Some of the answers may surprise you.

1. "Eat or watch TV."

2. "Every so often talk on the phone with a friend, but otherwise make my own dinner, watch some TV or listen to folk and protest music and/or teach myself to play the guitar, and do some homework."

3. "Sort out my homework, then do some reading"

4. "By this time my sister was more self-sufficient so I'd usually go to my bedroom, watch TV, write and daydream. I spent A LOT of my time inside my head."

5. "I spent a lot of time by myself outside of the sport and school activities I tried to get people to be friends with."

6. "Read"

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7. "I by then was very organized and fast at completing chores, so I had time to paint and write."

8. "Babysit my little brother, make dinner... the usual."

9. "I have been sleeping a lot after school. I'm an introverted kid, and I used to feel bad about wanting to sleep after school cause I was so tired, but now I feel better. I play the clarinet now, so I practice that and read."

10. "Got a snack and took a nap. I DESPISED high school."

11. "Cry, eat"

12. "Practiced my saxophone. Drew pictures. Went overboard on any creative projects the teachers gave me. Like, we were supposed to do an introduction to an epic poem in rhyming couplets. Mine was ten pages, and a whole rhyming couplet version of what happened after the end of "the Phantom of the Opera." The book, not the musical. In history we made children's books, and I was the first one the teacher ever gave a perfect score to because mine was fully illustrated and had doors and windows that opened to pictures underneath."

13. "Since I'm in high school that's easy, I go home and watch an hour of Sliders and then I usually

read homework or my book for fun and go on the internet."

Please understand how stressful a high school day can be for your introverted teen. Give him or her the privacy and quiet time desired when they get home in the afternoon and, if possible, a room of their own with a door that closes!

Above all, appreciate the ability of the introverted teen to stand alone. In plain English, this means their ability to withstand the peer pressures of drugs, alcohol, smoking and premarital sex are practically ironclad.

This is what one introvert said, "I was the nerdiest goody two shoes in high school you could possibly imagine. I was so shy I don't think I spoke to anyone the whole four years. But in a way, boys like that kind of girl, thinking they can push you around I suppose. So I got asked out a lot. Anyway, I had one guy try to force me to take a drink of wine. He simply could not believe it when I said no and meant it. Since I didn't care what anyone thought about me anyway, it was easy. I thought he was pathetic to even try!"

Introverts don't have the normal extroverted teen's craving to be part of the group. On some level, most of them know it isn't going in that direction anyway. Introverts are also well ahead of the game in knowing who they are. Some of the those interviewed mentioned a focus on getting into college or making good grades and were not tempted to get off track by pursuing activities of less mature classmates.

Last but not least, your introverted teen may not be susceptible to peer pressure where things like

drugs and sex are concerned. Next time you see him or her "hiding out" at the internet, you can thank your lucky stars for the introvert's innate self reliance.

Nancy R. Fenn is The IntrovertZCoach. Her mission in life is to raise consciousness about introversion as a legitimate personality type.

### **I've Learned To Love Teen Art**

**By Martin Stoleman**

I have loved art for as long as I can remember. As a child I spent hour after hour doing art projects of all kinds with my mother and my siblings. We would paint, practice sewing or create things out of clay for hours on end. I never knew that the amount of art projects we worked on was abnormal until I got a bit older and heard all of my friends and school talking about their years of playing with trucks and action figures or being outside building forts. I guess our mother wanted us to be well rounded individuals so she started us on all things art from the start. I don't remember exactly what kind of teen art I created during my formative years, but I do know that it wasn't until recently that I learned to appreciate teen art.

To the surprise of no one that I knew, I decided to become an art teacher when I went to college. I loved art so much that I couldn't think of a better way to spend my days than on teaching children and teens more about the things I loved. I enjoyed my elementary aged students immensely from the beginning. I loved their curiosity and I enjoyed the way they saw art. It was the teen art that my junior high aged students were creating that took me a while to adjust to.

The thing about teen art is that it is less than traditional and often it needs to be classified outside of any established genres of art. The teens in my art classes saw art in a much different way than I expected, and hence their work was much different as well. I would give them an assignment and they would create work so unlike what I had asked for and yet so creative that I couldn't complain.

I have realized that teen art needs to be a genre of art all by itself. Why? I've determined that teen art is so unique because of the time of life that it represents. Teens are going through the ultimate time of transition, so it makes sense that their art would have a particular perspective and slant. And as different as teen art can often be, I have learned to appreciate it. I have learned to see it through the eyes of a teenager exploring the world and trying to make sense of their place in the world.

If you have a teenager who likes to play around with any art form, then you probably know exactly what I'm talking about with teen art. In fact, you've probably had similar issues in trying to recognize, define or categorize the art work that seems to make your teen come alive. My advice to you is this: teen art is something entirely of its own kind. Stop trying to make teen art into something else, and instead just enjoy it for what it is.

Martin Stoleman is an elementary and junior high school art teacher. He loves working with students and seeing what kinds of teen art they will come up with next. See

for more  
details.



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