

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

Several of my neighbors are very friendly people and I like them a lot. They socialize often, and almost every weekend one or another of them will have some kind of cookout or gathering and invite me to join them. I really appreciate their hospitality, and I attend these events quite often, but sometimes I just want to chill out over the weekend. My job involves talking to people all the time and I find that it often drains me of energy. I don't want to hurt their feelings but is there a good way to explain that I sometimes just need my "space?" I find that I really do need alone time to read and just hang out. Can you help me explain this to my neighborhood friends without hurting their feelings?

-- Brenda

Dear Brenda,

What a great neighborhood you live in! In these days of waning social capital, it's nice to know that old-fashioned get-togethers are alive and well at least in your neck of the woods. Still, too much of a good thing isn't all that good for everyone in spite of Mae West's opinion that "Too much of a good thing can be...wonderful!"

Think about the world as being inhabited by two different kinds of people: Introverts and Extroverts. Extroverts get fueled through social contact. Their focus is on the outer world of people and things. They love gatherings with others and derive energy from being in groups. They may feel drained when they spend too much time alone.

Introverts, on the other hand, spend energy in social interactions. The real world to them is their inner life, the world of ideas and imagination. Some introverted people can actually become physically fatigued when their social calendar is too full.

What is important to know is that both styles are perfectly healthy ways of relating to our environments and other people. This is the truth beyond the stereotypes that extroverts (to an introvert) may appear to be noisy, shallow, brash, or loud. To extroverts hooked on pigeonholing, introverts seem silent, withdrawn, moody, or quiet. The truth is far more complicated than these superficial assumptions. Extroverts are not necessarily more interpersonally confident, and introverts are not necessarily shy or mousy people. Many introverts are assertive and thoroughly socially secure individuals.

Also, remember that no one is completely one or the other. Even a quintessential extrovert will want some time alone and even the most die-hard introvert needs people. Think of these temperaments as being endpoints on a continuum and each person can find his/her spot on that scale. Different societies seem to create and reinforce different interpersonal styles. In our American culture, approximately 75% of adults would score toward the extraverted end of the scale. That, of course, leaves introverts in the minority (but if you want to live in Tibet, these proportions are reversed).

At least part of your nature, Brenda, is introverted, and that part needs to be honored just as you honor the importance of good connections with your neighbors.

Let your neighbors know how much you appreciate being included in their gatherings. Bring a dish to share and be totally present while you are there. Engage in conversation. Find out about their lives. Reciprocate. Have one of these events at your

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house and invite them over. When you decline an invitation because you really need some time alone, let them know that you are grateful for the invitation but that you need some private time over the weekend. Find a good balance between the time you need for yourself and the time for your friends. If they are reasonable people, they will understand and value your honesty.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2006 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).