

Parent Guide



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What is this resource and how do I use it?

Highly sensitive children may be more aware and reactive to their surroundings. You may find them to be emotional, empathetic, well-mannered, and curious. They may also take situations personally or regret failures. This parent guide highlights some of the personality traits of highly sensitive children and gives some tips on how to support them.

What is the focus of this resource?

Mental Health

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Children's Emotions

Further Ideas and Suggestions

We have lots of other resources to support you with your child's emotional development. Why not check out these resources - [Create Your Own Calm Box](#) and [Coping Skills Spin Wheel](#) - in our [Managing Emotions hub](#).

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Tips for Supporting a Highly Sensitive Child

A highly sensitive child may be more aware and reactive to their surroundings. You may find them to be emotional, empathetic, well-mannered and curious. They may also take situations personally and regret failures. Although highly sensitive children may often seem shy or fearful, this might not be the case. If you have a highly sensitive child, it's important to pay attention to their feelings and behaviour.

Signs of a Highly Sensitive Child:

Highly sensitive children are generally more susceptible to people and experiences. Below are some of the most common traits you may notice in your child:

Reacts Emotionally

Highly sensitive children will react emotionally to almost everything. A stern look from a teacher or other adult could reduce them to tears or play on their minds for a long time after. Being highly empathetic means they can feel bad about or worry about the problems of others. Your child will want to try to fix those problems and make it right for the other person, becoming overly upset if they can't or if they feel that they're the ones to blame.

TIP: Try to tune into their emotions and understand their feelings although, to you, they might seem extreme. Acknowledge and accept that this is how your child feels. Let your child know that you recognise and understand their feelings.

Your child may want to stay out of certain situations or social interactions as they are overwhelmed or anxious about them. Support them with this and encourage them by guiding their interactions with others.

Difficulty in Making a Choice

A highly sensitive child will look into various details and subtleties when making decisions. This can make it difficult for them to select one option, even when it's something as simple as choosing between two outfits.

TIP: If they appear to be taking a long time in making a decision, try not to show your frustration. Instead, give them space or try giving them a clear time limit to think about it for themselves before you step in with guidance. If you feel it's important for them to make a particular decision, speak to them and discuss your thoughts, explaining your thought process to them.

If they made a decision that is different from the one you would've liked, don't punish them. Simply explain why you would've made a different decision and let them consider this in their own time.

Understands Others Well

Highly sensitive children are empathetic and have keen observation skills. They will pick up on character traits quite quickly and be able to get a good picture of who someone is.



Feeling Guilty

If they feel that they have made a bad choice they will feel extremely guilty, which also heightens their struggles with decision-making. It can take them time to come out of this feeling and nothing said to them will change this.

TIP: Sometimes as parents, you may apologise for your child's behaviour in social situations, particularly if they seem overly emotional. A highly sensitive child may see this as them being the cause of embarrassment, making them feel guilty. Over time it may cause them to become introverted and uncomfortable talking about their feelings. Although you cannot force them to stop feeling guilty, reassuring them that everyone feels guilty about things and encouraging them to talk about their feelings of guilt can help to alleviate their feelings.

Asks a Lot of Questions

All children ask a lot of questions but you may notice that a highly sensitive child will often ask particularly personal and insightful questions involving things you may not have thought about.

TIP: Encourage and highlight all these virtues in your child and show them how they can use these skills to their advantage. Being sensitive can be a positive as it helps them to care for and understand others in a way that not everyone can. Your child may have an amazing imagination, be extremely creative or be a wonderful listener. They may perceive things much better and have a host of skills that not all children have. Encourage them to tap into, celebrate and hone these skills.

Bottles Up Failures

Highly sensitive children will tend to think very deeply about things compared to other children of their age. A simple failure such as not reaching a target at school, or scoring less on a test than their friends, will be something that they brood on and wonder what they did wrong and how they could've done differently. This can result in stress, anxiety and low confidence.

TIP: Make sure that you tell your child you love them no matter what. Use your words and actions to show that you love them just the way they are.

Well-Mannered and Polite

Highly sensitive children are usually well-behaved and polite.

Takes Things Personally

Highly sensitive children can be highly emotional. They can take everything that happens as personal to them. They will react to everything in a way that shows they feel it's only applicable to them. Any mistakes or failures are perceived as solely their 'fault', whether that is actually true or not.

TIP: Your child may sometimes feel they are different from others which can be something they struggle with. Encourage them to notice other people's differences. Take time to celebrate and encourage their individuality.

Animal Lover

Highly sensitive children will often develop bonds with animals and show complete trust towards pets. They will take extra care of pets and be especially sensitive to their needs.

Has a Tough Exterior

When a child is highly sensitive, they feel any perceived slights much more deeply. If they're hurt by something you said or did they will hold on to it rather than expressing it to you.

TIP: It's important to keep lines of communication open. Model talking about feelings, for example, if someone upsets you, explain to them how it's made you feel and why. Explain that by talking it out, even though it can be difficult, you will be able to move forward.

Habits of a Highly Sensitive Child:

- Highly sensitive children lead with their hearts as they empathise with others.
- They can be talkative and like to feel appreciated by their peers but can be easily upset by a negative comment.
- Highly sensitive children often enjoy spending time alone.
- They're perfectionists and will work hard to ensure their work is exactly as it should be (in their eyes).
- Although highly sensitive children struggle to make decisions, their instinct will play a large part in whatever decision they do make.
- They do not like horror films or films where characters experience negative situations for example films like Watership Down.
- Although they like to spend time alone, they are also good team players.
- They often like to work quietly in closed environments where they're not visible to others.

Other Hints and Tips:

Reassure Them: tell your child that you love them no matter what. Use your words and actions to show your child that you love them just the way they are.

Take Baby Steps: parenting a sensitive child can mean that you need to give them a lot of support. It will be beneficial for them to sometimes view you as a partner, not just as a parent. For example, you could help them to make friends by planning specific interactions with them and arranging one-to-one play dates at home where your child feels most comfortable.

Parent Guide: Tips for Supporting a Highly Sensitive Child

Plan Ahead: unexpected situations can be overwhelming for a highly sensitive child. If something unexpected happens, try to make time to take your child to the side and talk through how they're feeling and a broad plan of what might happen next. Check in with them throughout the experience. Discuss the plans for any trips or experiences with them beforehand so they understand what's coming. Give them options for a quiet place where they can take a time out when they feel overwhelmed.

Teach Your Child How to Manage a Crisis: even though you might want to always be by your child's side, there may be times when they have to manage alone. It could be in school or at the house of a friend or relative. Teach your child ways in which he can calm down and control their anxieties. Repeating affirmations like 'I can handle this' or 'I can do it' can help them to calm down. Simple breathing exercises can reduce feelings of anxiety and overwhelm.

Stay Calm: it's normal to sometimes lose your cool as a parent, especially when you feel your efforts are not being used or valued. Try to understand that being highly sensitive is not a condition but a personality trait and attempt to start looking at things from your child's perspective. Do not feel guilty if your best strategies are not working. Stay calm and give yourself some time. Take a break and ask your partner for help, especially if you feel you may lose your temper.

Focus on Strengths: talk to your child about the positive aspects of being sensitive. Remember together that there are ways they will react to situations that are better than the ways others will react. Discussing their strengths and talents can build your child's confidence, helping them to work through the trickier times when they need to.

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