



Trauma  
Care

# Newsletter

## TraumaCare

Box 1807, Magaliesview, 2067

5a Franshoek Rd, Lonehill

Tel: 0715929690

Website: [www.traumacare.co.za](http://www.traumacare.co.za)

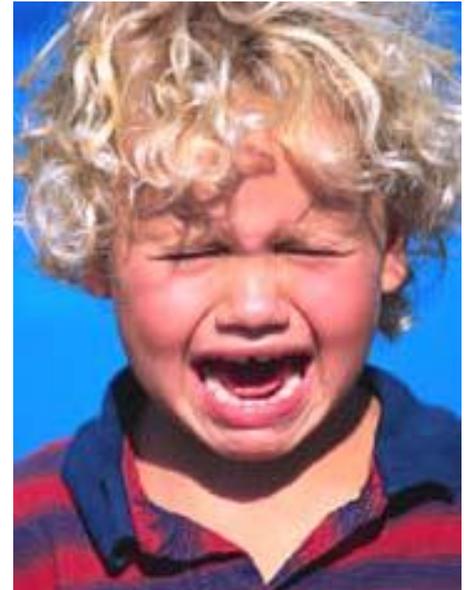
Email: [mail@traumacare.co.za](mailto:mail@traumacare.co.za)

10 March 2012

## The Highly Sensitive Child

A highly sensitive child is one of the fifteen to twenty percent of children born with a nervous system that is highly aware and quick to react to everything.

This makes them quick to grasp subtle changes, prefer to reflect deeply before acting, and generally behave conscientiously. They are also easily overwhelmed by high levels of stimulation, sudden changes, and the emotional distress of others. He cries at the drop of a hat—or a toy. She crumbles if you raise your voice at her, even slightly. He seems to have a bionic sense of smell. Before you write your child off as a drama queen, consider the fact that this behavior may be innate.



Sensitive children have different, or perhaps more exaggerated, reactions to things. They don't act the way you'd expect a typical child should in many situations. Unfortunately, in our society, this is often seen as weakness. But according to Jeremy G. Schneider, a MFT (marriage and family therapist), it's just the opposite. Says Schneider, "The reality is that sensitive children have a gift. They are able to experience the world at a higher level than average children."

### So, what now?

First, appreciate that this is a wonderful trait. It is no illness or syndrome. Nor is it something new someone made up or "just discovered." It is an inborn temperament or style that is found in about twenty percent of children and of nearly all animals. Anything so persistent is not abnormal.

It represents a strategy of taking everything into account before acting (the other, more common innate strategy is to act quickly and be first, then think later). The trait serves an important purpose for the individual sensitive person and for the larger society—for example, sensitive persons sense danger and see the consequences of an action before others do.



Unfortunately, the trait has been somewhat misunderstood in our culture, so that most psychologists and parents tend to see only one aspect of some sensitive children and call this trait shyness, inhibitedness, fearfulness, fussiness, or "hyper" sensitivity. If one could see inside the mind of a sensitive child, however, one would learn the whole story of what is going on—creativity, intuition, surprising wisdom, empathy for others...

But, for all of that to blossom, they absolutely must be raised with understanding. Otherwise, as adults they are prone to depression, anxiety, and shyness.

**Check list to determine whether a child is highly sensitive – if you tick 13 blocks or more your child may be highly sensitive**

- Startles easily
- Complains about scratchy clothing, seams in socks, or labels against his/her skin
- Doesn't usually enjoy big surprises
- Learns better from a gentle correction than strong punishment
- Seems to read my mind
- Uses big words for his/her age
- Notices the slightest unusual odor
- Has a clever sense of humor
- Seems very intuitive
- IS hard to get to sleep after an exciting day
- Doesn't do well with big changes
- Wants to change clothes if wet or sandy
- Asks lots of questions
- Is a perfectionist
- Notices the distress of others
- Prefers quiet play
- Asks deep, thought-provoking questions
- Is very sensitive to pain
- Is bothered by noisy places
- Notices subtleties (something that's been moved, a change in a person's appearance, etc)
- Considers if it is safe before climbing high
- Performs best when strangers aren't present
- Feels things deeply



**How Parents Can Help the Sensitive Child**

The goal for the parent of a sensitive child is to work around the child's sensitivities in order to provide the basic psychological experiences that she needs for emotional development. But it takes a special kind of parenting to cope successfully with a child who is drowning in a sea of sensations. Even though she may be a gifted, brilliant child, her sensory system isn't quite under her control.

**Adjust your behavior, not your child's.** Don't try to force her to adapt to society's demands. Love and accept your sensitive child unconditionally. You cannot change who he is. He needs to know you love him no matter how he perceives or reacts to the world.

**Become partners.** Work with your child to create ways to interact with the world safely. For instance, she'll likely have an easier time interacting with classmates 1:1 than in larger groups, so set up individual play dates so she gets comfortable with several classmates.

**Focus on strengths.** Sensitivity is practically a stigma in the U.S. and it's important not to "label" your child. Help him understand that he experiences the world more deeply than most children, and help him see the

strengths associated with this. He may notice things most people don't, have a better imagination, focus or concentrate better, be a gifted student, or empathize and be sensitive to others.

**Make small changes.** If you need to make changes to your child's environment, make them little by little. She will feel less overwhelmed.

**Nudge, don't push.** Most highly sensitive children get easily distressed when they have to make a decision. They often reject opportunities out of fear. Sometimes the best thing you can do is nudge your child to take a risk or try something new. The same goes for punishment. He'll respond better to you gently correcting his behavior, rather than yelling at him. If your highly sensitive child knows you will be there for him and love him no matter what he is feeling, he'll have less hesitation in new situations, and will be less self-conscious or risk-averse. If he knows you're not going to push him to be something he's not, you'll both be a lot more relaxed and prepared for the road ahead.



I think we need to remember that there are many types of adults in the world, shy, outgoing, pushy, deep-thinking, humours etc, this is the same when we look at children, there are many different types of children, some sensitive, some out going, some very active, some very quiet. This is the child's character he is born with, we cannot change it however we can help them fit into the world by teaching them social skills and coping skills where needed.

This newsletter has been issued by:  
TraumaCare, Box 1807, Magaliesview, Gauteng, 2067  
[www.traumacare.co.za](http://www.traumacare.co.za) \* [mail@traumacare.co.za](mailto:mail@traumacare.co.za) \* Tel: 071 592 9690  
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