**HSP’s- Highly Sensitive People**

(aka Sensory Processing Sensitivity or A Finely Tuned Nervous System)

**So what is an HSP?**​ It’s a Highly Sensitive Person. It is a temperament, a personality trait. It’s innate and it’s common (approx. 20% pop. is an HSP) HSP was coined by researcher Dr. Elaine Aron.

**What is it not?**​ A diagnosis. It’s not an illness or a problem. It isn’t something that needs to be fixed, cured or suppressed. It doesn’t mean weakness. It’s also not always Introversion ( 30% of HSP’s are NOT introverts) and it’s not always Social Anxiety (many HSP’s suffer from Social Anxiety but not all)

**So what does a highly sensitive person look like?**

HSP’s DNA causes a them to feel more deeply, have stronger emotional reactions, become over-stimulated more easily, notice subtleties more acutely, are bothered by sudden change, they are prone to perfectionism, process more deeply and thoroughly, act more conscientiously, experience physical sensitivity more often and cry more easily.

**Is this starting to sound like someone you know? Maybe you? What is it about HSP’s that makes life more challenging?**

This is what they say....a 16 yr old girl described her experience of the world like she was on the freeway in the slow lane watching the cars zipping past her and it made her jumpy. I had one teen client who would become tearful talking about anything meaningful and experienced the most terrifying nightmares. Other HSP’s described life like they are walking around with no skin, like a sponge absorbing everything that comes their way. One HSP described his experience as on-going daily assaults on his nervous system.

A quote from an HSP reflecting on his childhood (one of five brothers, an overwhelmed mother and strict father) “ I felt like something was wrong with me since I didn’t fit in with my family. I was a perfect example of a highly sensitive person as described in the books I’ve read on the subject. As a boy I was very sensitive to cold, couldn’t have tags on the back of my shirts, and had to have clothes that fit just perfectly. My parents didn’t understand me and considered me spoiled. For example I could tell when bread had a slightly moldy taste and wouldn’t eat it, yet everyone else in the family thought there was nothing wrong with it. They thought I was crazy. Even when, the next day, you could physically see the mold, they still were not convinced that I could taste the mold the day before.”

A highly sensitive temperament can make life challenging especially if raised in a difficult household. HSP’s can also be more susceptible to mental health issues such as anxiety and depression.

**So how can understanding HSP’s help parents and individuals? How can you help an HSP in your life learn to have a better relationship with their genetic make-up?**

**Knowledge and understanding -**​HSP’s are often misunderstood and often do not understand themselves. Understanding how they react to their worlds and being able to share your understanding with them, can be such a relief and can improve your ability to connect with them.

**Normalizing -**​Having a sensitive temperament is common (1 in 5 people are highly sensitive)

**Reframing**​ their challenging traits into positives; Helping them see the strengths in their sensitivity. Feeling deeply makes you compassionate, noticing subtleties can give you an advantage, you see things before others

**Reducing stress-** ​Stress has a huge impact on HSP’s because they feel deeply and have that “laser vision” so managing stress is key to their well-being.

**Educating parents**​ about their teen’s sensitivity can help them understand how important managing the home environment can be in helping their teen manage their overwhelming internal world and most importantly can help them find empathy for their teen. The combination of high sensitivity and challenging environments or with parents who don’t understand their sensitivity, can contribute to teens impairment.

**Alane Freund’s Five to Thrive- 1. To know the trait is real and that you have it  
2. Design a life that is compatible with your finely tuned nervous system-**​creating a life that is around managing over-stimulation (know yourself and what you need)  
**3. To reframe the past -** ​in light of the fact you grew up sensitive  
**4. Heal old trauma-** ​learn to respect your sensitivity  
**5. Know other HSP’s**

**Parent’s temperaments may not be a good fit**​ – Helping parents look at their own temperament and parenting style which may be contributing to their child’s challenges. Think about the high energy anxious extroverted parent and how overwhelming they can be for an HSP kid.

**Slowing things down-** ​​overstimulation can be a frequent state for HSP’s, so pace is crucial. It is important to slow things way down, be brief and concise in presenting information, taking frequent breaks, reviewing the agenda multiple times, and allowing time after introducing a concept. I’ve seen so many parents struggle with slowing things down because their lives are busy or they struggle themselves with organization.

**Why are HSP’s so amazing?**

They are compassionate, good listeners, observant to details, have a deep inner sense of what’s right and wrong, concern about the humane treatment of animals, sense of responsibility, conscientiousness, creativity, they feel love deeply, have great intuitive ability, ability to have and appreciate deep spiritual experiences. HSP’s are artists, musicians, therapists, leaders, entrepreneurs, teachers, CEO’s.

A quote from an HSP named Peter “I deeply enjoy making music, listening to the sounds in the subtleties of rhythm and texture. What a gift my sensitivity is!”

**Recommended Books**

**HSP- Highly Sensitive People  
Get to know them and/or yourself better**

* Documentary Sensitive- The Untold Story- click on link

<https://sensitive-theuntoldstory.vhx.tv/products/sensitive-the-untold-story-1>

* Parenting the Highly Sensitive Child-Julie B. Rosenshein
* The Highly Sensitive Person’s Toolkit -Everyday strategies for thriving in an overstimulating world- Allison Lefkowitz **\*\*\* excellent for teens and parents**
* The Orchid and the Dandelion-W. Thomas Boyce, M.D.
* The Highly Sensitive Person- How to Thrive when the World Overwhelms You- Elaine Aron
* The Highly Sensitive Person’s Survival Guide; Essential Skills for Living Well in an Overstimulating World -Ted Zeff
* A Highly Sensitive Person’s Life; Stories and Advice for those who experience the world intensely - Kelly O’Laughlin
* Psychotherapy and the Highly Sensitive Person by Elaine N. Aron
* The Strong Sensitive Boy - Tedd Zeff
* The Emotional Gift - Yong Kay Chan
* Is It Them Or Is It Me?: A Highly Sensitive Person’s Guide to Family - Martha Weber
* The Emotional Compass; How to Know Think Better About Your Feelings - Ilse Sand

**Am I a Highly Sensitive Person?**

1. You feel ALL the feelings
2. You can often tell what someone’s feeling, or when something’s wrong with those you love.
3. You tend to prefer exercising on your own.
4. Or really, just working on your own in general.
5. You’re very polite.
6. In fact, you’d describe yourself as a “people pleaser.”
7. For that reason, it’s very difficult for you to say “no” to anything.
8. You take ages to make decisions. . .no matter how small. You’re incredibly observant.
9. You’re a bit of a perfectionist.
10. You tend to react more than most people.
11. You’re not afraid to let the tear ducts take over.
12. People often look down on you for your​ ​emotional tendencies, or tell you “not to take things so seriously.”
13. You have a lower pain tolerance than most people you know.
14. You scare kind of easily.
15. No one really likes loud, annoying noises, but you ​*hate*​ them.
16. You also hate bright, fluorescent lights.
17. You’re super-creative
18. You’re not the only one in your family who’s highly sensitive
19. You struggle with taking care of your body
20. You tend to like things “before they’re cool.”

\*\*\* **You can also** **go to hsperson.com and click on SELF-TESTS to see if you or a loved one is an HSP**