

# HIGH SENSITIVITY AND THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

**A guide for educators and teachers**

Understanding, supporting, and nurturing the  
unique characteristics of highly sensitive children

**AGES 0 - 11**

Based on scientifically  
recognized information



# High sensitivity and the educational environment

## A guide for educators and teachers

Understanding, supporting, and nurturing the unique characteristics of highly sensitive children

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A good fit occurs when an educational environment nurtures and encourages children's natural behavior, accepting and valuing them for who they truly are

## How often have you found yourself engaging with children who express emotions very intensely?



Because of this intense way of reacting, they are frequently misunderstood, deeply misinterpreted, and sometimes unfairly labeled as difficult to manage. Adults often describe them using words like “too” or, conversely, “not very” before adjectives, highlighting how their natural intensity or innate caution is perceived as exaggerated:

**Too** sensitive, **too** easily hurt, **not very** sociable, **too** moody, **too** shy, **not very** participative, **too** restless, **too** distracted, **not very** talkative, **too** easily offended, **not very** motivated, **too** reactive ...

These are the children in front of whom educators and teachers often wonder what could have triggered such strong emotional reactions - reactions that are frequently judged as inappropriate or exaggerated. As a result, and following common practice, they are often asked to feel less, not to overreact, and to be less sensitive. **Yet experiencing everything more intensely and perceiving things more deeply than most other children is part of their way of being and engaging with the world** [1]. Highly sensitive children are born this way: approximately one in five presents this particular but normal **temperament trait** [2]. These children perceive the world differently: through their five senses, **they experience everything more vividly**, which naturally leads to **amplified emotional reactions** [3].

The role of educators and teachers is not to change these children or try to make them “tougher”, but to help them understand, accept, and manage their heightened sensitivity. It is therefore crucial for the educational approach to look beyond visible reactions, embracing the complexity of their inner experiences without labeling them.



## And what about encountering children who find it challenging to adapt to new environments, engage in new experiences, or connect with new groups?

They are often seen as shy, not very sociable, or not very proactive and participative, when in fact their deeper information processing and heightened attention to detail make them more thoughtful, reserved, hesitant, and cautious [1,4,5]. They need extra time to process information, adapt to new situations, or make decisions. These are children who choose carefully whom to play with and often have a few, but meaningful, friendships [6].



## Have you ever come across children who allow themselves to be moved, excited, and amazed even by the smallest things?

High sensitivity allows them to experience and engage with the world more deeply. It amplifies their experiences and emotional responses [1,3], leading them to express a powerful joy of living, as they find pleasure even in small things, become easily enthusiastic, and allow themselves to be amazed and filled with wonder. These children are capable of spreading a strong energy around them, promoting and fostering the creation of positive environments [7,9].



## And what about being able to witness how deeply empathetic they are?



These are children with a high and remarkable empathy; they care deeply about the difficulties and emotions of others, showing altruistic and pro-social behavior [8], which positively influences the classroom atmosphere and supports social inclusion [9]. They tend to feel uneasy in conflict situations, such as when classmates argue or when an educator or teacher has to reprimand a classmate. They pursue harmony.

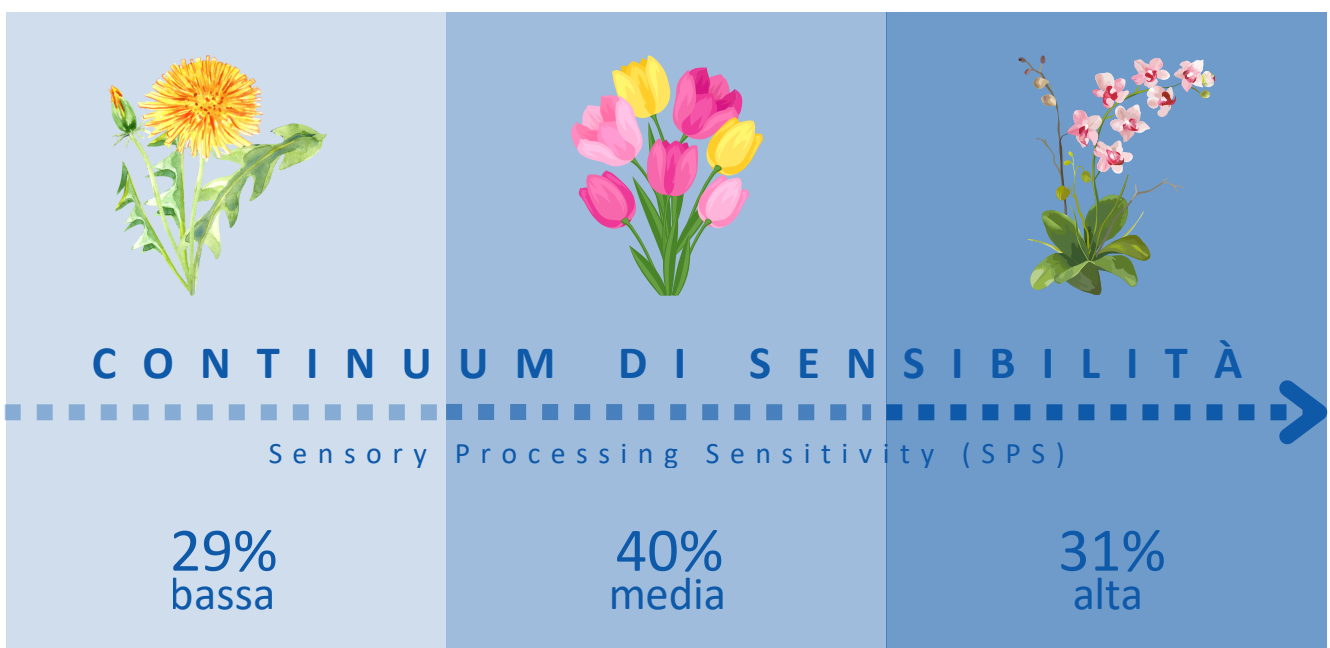
## Have you ever been amazed by their deep reflections and intuitions?

Their heightened attention to detail and pronounced reflective depth help these children understand the world more deeply, giving them a strong sense of the bigger picture and a greater awareness of themselves and their surroundings [1,6]. They take time to think carefully and often need more time to respond to questions. They are intuitive, attuned to opportunities, and able to anticipate the consequences of their actions. These children impress adults with their reasoning and their ability to engage with abstract and complex topics beyond their years [6].



## What is high sensitivity?

High sensitivity is a normal and innate temperament trait. Highly sensitive individuals are those who exhibit elevated levels of a temperament trait scientifically known as **Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS)** [1], which describes both positive and negative differences in individuals' sensitivity to their environment. Recent research shows that this trait should be understood and **contextualized along a normal continuum of sensitivity, from low to high** [2]: we are all sensitive, but each in our own way, which is why people express their sensitivity differently. Within this continuum, **20–30% of individuals fall at the higher end of Sensory Processing Sensitivity**, regardless of factors such as culture, age, or gender. The diagram below helps illustrate how this continuum also exists within the group of highly sensitive individuals, which explains why even among highly sensitive people, levels of sensitivity vary.



According to this model, depending on their different levels of sensitivity to environmental and caregiving conditions [9], people can be grouped into three types, metaphorically represented by flowers [2]: about 29% of individuals have low sensitivity, like dandelions, able to thrive almost anywhere; 40% are moderately sensitive, like tulips, who flourish under supportive conditions; and 31% of the population is highly sensitive, like orchids, requiring more careful care but capable of extraordinary growth and beauty.

**The same proportion is seen in over 100 animal species** [10], showing that high sensitivity is a **normal variation along the sensitivity continuum** - it is not a disorder, syndrome, or pathology. This trait has been naturally selected over evolution as a **survival strategy for species** [11]: some individuals have the role of sentinels, they constantly monitor the environment and raise an alarm in the event of potential threats (the behavioral "pause to check" system). This highlights how responsiveness to the environment is **one of the key factors shaping behavioral differences** [12].

# Individuals' sensitivity shapes the way they experience and relate to the world and to others

People differ in the way they interact with their surrounding environment and vary in their sensitivity to environmental stimuli, whether physical or material (e.g., sounds, smells, lights) or psychological and emotional (e.g., relationships, classroom climate) [9]. **High environmental sensitivity reflects neurobiological differences** in the central nervous system **and is linked to genetic predispositions**, which are associated with a more developed emotional-affective area of an individual's personality.

Highly sensitive individuals, due to their **heightened perception of sensory, emotional, and social stimuli**, tend to be more aware of what is happening both inside and around them, noticing aspects of reality that often go unnoticed by others. This results in an intensified reactivity and emotional sensitivity, which may sometimes interfere with daily life or, conversely, enrich it [13].

**The deeper sensory processing** of a highly sensitive person is not related to a more developed sense organ. It **occurs when sensory information is transmitted and processed by the brain** [12]. Compared to those without this trait, highly sensitive individuals perceive and process information neurophysiologically in a different way, **showing greater activation in specific brain areas** related to awareness and sensory integration, involved in attention, emotional responses to social stimuli, and empathic feelings [1,8].

The reasoning of a highly sensitive person is guided by **greater activity in the right hemisphere of the brain**, which is governed by emotions and affectivity, serves as the seat of creativity, and favors sensory information, intuition, and instinct [14]. Their brain primarily operates at an emotional-affective level and secondarily at a cortical level, giving them an advantage in learning when the educational environment supports their sensitivity. **If highly sensitive children receive appropriate stimulation, emotional engagement, and positive self-evaluation, they can learn a great deal; without such support, they may struggle** [12,14].



*Learning, in particular, is possible only when both the teacher and the subject involve emotional engagement*

**C. Petitcollin**

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND AND SUPPORT HIGH SENSITIVITY IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS?



**High sensitivity to environmental stimuli is particularly influenced by the environment - family, work, education, culture, etc. - in which we grow up and live** [15,16]

Children who are born with a stronger emotional-affective predisposition in their personality, and who naturally maintain a heightened state of awareness to stimuli, cannot be treated in the same way as most other children. Scientific research shows that this particular temperament trait can make them more vulnerable to their environment: **the environment in which they grow up has a greater impact on their personality, behavior, and health** [17], **both positively and negatively** (consistent with the framework of Differential Susceptibility [16] and related models such as Vantage Sensitivity).

Differences in the degree of environmental sensitivity can be observed from early childhood. Compared to their peers, highly sensitive children **benefit more from a well-calibrated and supportive environment** [16], where they can fully express their potential. Similarly, they are **more affected by a negative environment** [16], as their heightened sensitivity amplifies traumas, deficiencies, and deprivations, profoundly influencing their personality [17].

**This means that the educational approach, the way children are cared for, the teaching methods adopted, and the learning spaces themselves have a particularly strong influence on highly sensitive children.** When an educational environment recognizes and values high sensitivity, it can positively shape the future of a significant proportion of children - the 20–30% who are highly sensitive - thereby making a meaningful contribution to the well-being of society as a whole [18].

What often appears as a behavioral difficulty in highly sensitive children is, in reality, a coherent response to an environment that does not meet their needs. **The educational task, therefore, is not to fix the child, but to transform the context:** to offer methods, relationships, tone of voice, pace, and learning spaces that are attuned to their heightened sensitivity.

### What do highly sensitive children need in order to thrive?



They need **an educational approach that gives them more time, more patience, more presence, more understanding, and more empathy.** They thrive with a **reinforcing and supportive approach - one that values listening, fosters cooperation, encourages emotional self-regulation, offers constructive and realistic feedback, and ensures a balanced level of sensory and emotional stimulation to support deeper learning** [18,19,20,21]. It's important to note that this kind of educational environment benefits all students, not just the more sensitive ones.

**It is essential for educators and teachers to develop a trained eye for observation,** as this capacity is a fundamental aspect of their relationship with the children in their care and **an indispensable tool for shaping an environment that truly responds to their needs** [17].

# DISTINCTIVE BEHAVIORAL TRAITS AND AN APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

## Distinctive behavioral characteristics of highly sensitive children

**Highly sensitive children, even from a young age, exhibit in educational settings the typical aspects of the trait** highlighted by Dr. Elaine Aron's studies [6,12]. **These are neutral characteristics** (not diagnostic) **but they can nevertheless affect daily life and school adaptation.** Considering these features, it is important to remember that **highly sensitive children are each unique: they may behave and respond differently to the environment** because the degree of high sensitivity varies from child to child, because they inherit other traits that interact with high sensitivity, because they have experienced different life events, and because they grow up in diverse cultural, familial, and educational contexts. Within this variability, extroverted highly sensitive children may not always display the same level of hesitation and slower pace in forming relationships as introverted ones, yet can still become easily overstimulated and in need of quiet spaces.

### 1 - Greater depth of information processing

Highly sensitive children process information in a more complex way: they perceive stimuli and experiences more intensely, process them more deeply, and show a heightened observational awareness, advanced reflective abilities, and depth of thought. They are more attentive, yet also more easily distracted, sometimes slower, and more cautious. They are particularly influenced by the external environment as well as by their own emotional state.



### 2 - Tendency to overstimulation

A higher baseline level of arousal (level of activation/attention), a lower sensory threshold, and deeper information processing can lead to greater cognitive fatigue, making highly sensitive children more easily overwhelmed and exhausted in situations of intense or prolonged stimulation, whether sensory or social. The shift from understimulation to overstimulation can sometimes occur very quickly, with their threshold being reached rapidly.

### 3 - Emotional responsiveness and heightened empathy

They experience emotions more deeply, both negative and positive. They respond more intensely to environmental stimuli and to emotional cues in social situations, as they are particularly sensitive to them. Highly sensitive children express their discomfort and react to overstimulation in different ways:

some children "explode," drawing attention to themselves (externalizing reactions), while others become invisible and harmless, tending to "implode" (internalizing reactions). They also demonstrate a strong capacity for empathy, thanks to greater activation of mirror neurons.



### 4 - Sensitivity and ability to notice details and subtleties

Because their brains have a greater capacity to process and assign meaning even to the smallest pieces of information, their five senses exert a much stronger influence on them: they notice subtle changes in the environment and have heightened physical sensitivity. They also have the ability to perceive stimuli beyond what is visible or explicit, unconsciously linking them to other variables, which makes them highly intuitive even at a young age.

**The following pages will help you better understand how high sensitivity manifests in children, and how to create an educational environment that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait - minimizing its challenges and enhancing its strengths - for the benefit of the whole class.**



## 1- Greater depth of information processing

### CHALLENGES

#### Wide-ranging perception, depth and longer information processing times

- Their attention is drawn to everything happening around and within them. In noisy or chatty environments, they have difficulty selecting and focusing on a single stimulus and tend to lose concentration: they can appear very distracted, thoughtful, absent-minded, or repetitive
- They need more time to process stimuli, reflect, answer questions, make decisions, and complete assigned tasks
- They tend to dwell more on their experiences, mistakes, and the negative aspects of a non-optimal environment
- Their deep reflectiveness can lead to unusual fears that persist over time
- They have difficulty relaxing and quieting their minds, may struggle to fall asleep, and can wake up crying, with light or restless sleep. These children often experience many vivid and complex dreams

### EXAMPLES

**Deep reflection** – When the educator or teacher gives instructions for an assignment, asks a question, or when the class discusses important topics, it is possible to observe that the child reflects more deeply than their peers. As a result, they may need more time to think and respond. Sometimes, this means the child may ask questions or give answers later than expected, often after the discussion has moved on to other questions or topics. This can be a source of frustration for the child.

**Diffuse attention** – When the child has to complete a task, their attention is captured by everything happening around them and within themselves. They notice the bulldozer moving outside the window, the sound of rain hitting the glass distracts them, classmates chatting at nearby desks pull their focus away, and excessive heat in the classroom makes them uncomfortable and tired. They struggle to select and focus on a single stimulus and tend to lose concentration.

**Dwells on past experiences** – In class, the child keeps thinking about the argument they had with their mother at breakfast. This worries and upsets them, making it difficult to concentrate on the task given by the teacher.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Deep Listening

For more sensitive children, it is important to feel acknowledged, seen, and understood. The educator or teacher must be fully present with both verbal and non-verbal attention when the child shares something:



**DO NOT:** interrupt, judge, ridicule, advise, ask questions, minimize, disapprove, interpret, embarrass

Stay with them, make them feel welcomed in their reflections, and allow them to freely express their perceptions, thoughts, reflections, worries, suffering, fears, pain, and tears.



#### SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-EMPATHY

In this way, they will strengthen their positive sense of self and learn to listen to themselves, increasing awareness of their feelings, moods, thoughts, emotions, and needs

#### More time, more pauses, fewer distractions

Give them the necessary time to process stimuli, reflect, answer questions, think about instructions, make decisions, and complete a task. Include breaks between activities. If concentration is required, eliminate potential sources of distraction.



They will be able to learn more effectively and feel less fatigued and agitated



### LEARNING SPACES

Avoid crowded and chaotic environments. Provide orderly spaces with shelves and designated areas for tidying toys and educational materials. Create more secluded areas to facilitate concentration and spaces where children can withdraw and relax. Classrooms should not be overly bright, with artificial lighting that is not too intense and walls painted in soft, neutral colors. Pay attention to and try to reduce low-frequency sounds.



## 1- Greater depth of information processing

### CHALLENGES

#### Susceptibility to social and time pressures

- When exposed to time constraints or social pressure, they hesitate more in completing tasks. They do not like being observed or tested
- They are sensitive to expectations, fear disappointing others or being found at fault, ruminate on criticism, worry about judgments, dislike being teased, and perceive rejection more deeply
- They have a strong sense of fairness and equality: they are particularly sensitive to injustice, jokes at their expense, teasing, and disparities
- They are more affected by negative environments that lack support, are competitive, or conflictual (often struggling to defend themselves). They feel easily uncomfortable when other children argue or when classmates are reprimanded by the educator or teacher

### EXAMPLES

**When under pressure** - In class, highly sensitive children can feel uncomfortable, and their emotional tension increases when the teacher asks direct, pointed questions that require an immediate response. Feeling tested and observed, the child fears making mistakes and worries about potential judgment. When called upon, they appear tense and stressed, and feeling overwhelmed, they perform far worse than they would in a more collaborative, calm, and relaxed environment.

**In the face of injustice** - The child becomes visibly upset when experiencing or witnessing injustice. If a classmate is unfairly reprimanded by the teacher, the child shows a strong desire for justice to be done.

**Dwells on criticism** - When criticized, the child is particularly sensitive to the words, tone, and demeanor of the educator or teacher. They tend to ruminate on the event, recalling the discomfort and negative feelings experienced in that moment.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Protection from social and time pressures

Do not demand too much or hover over them:



DO NOT: repeatedly ask the same question, insist on an immediate answer, stare at or scrutinize them, judge them, compare them to others, evaluate or correct them publicly, put them on the spot, or make them the center of attention



You will help maintain the child's normal level of arousal, allowing them to learn more and perform at their best. You will prevent them from feeling even more different or "wrong"

#### Unconditional acceptance

Children should be welcomed for who they are, adopting a responsive approach full of understanding and patience. This helps the child perceive and accept their own limits while building confidence in their abilities. The educator should teach them not to depend on others' judgment or approval. Value their uniqueness and support them in developing critical thinking skills.



You will support the child in understanding, validating, and accepting themselves, helping them avoid losing their sense of self, over-adapting, or conforming just to gain approval or be loved

#### Praise progress

Highlight every small success, placing greater emphasis and appreciation on the process, the effort, and the progress made rather than on results or final achievements.



You will help them build greater self-confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to consciously embrace their potential and believe in their abilities

#### Shared Rules

Follow shared rules to create a calm, cooperative, and low-competitive environment, minimizing disparities, injustices, and any form of mistreatment.



## 1- Greater depth of information processing

### CHALLENGES

#### Difficulty adapting to new situations and changes

- Their depth of processing often makes them more inhibited and hesitant. They tend to be cautious in new situations or experiences and may struggle to cope with change - including transitions from one activity to another or from one space to another
- They may find it challenging to build relationships with new people, integrate into new groups, or work collaboratively with children they do not yet know, while more extroverted highly sensitive children usually find this easier.

### EXAMPLES

**A new teacher or a new class** - A highly sensitive child may need more time than their peers to adjust to a new teacher or class, as well as when new students join during the school year.

Allow them the time they need to settle in, avoiding excessive attention that could prolong the adjustment. In new environments, they may struggle to form friendships and usually prefer a few close, meaningful relationships. Pairing them with another highly sensitive child during group activities or seating them together can gently support connection

**A new experience** - When faced with a new experience - such as trying a new slide in the playground, tasting unfamiliar food, petting an animal they do not know, or joining a new game (including during physical education) — a highly sensitive child tends to be more cautious, hesitant, and thoughtful. They carefully analyze the situation, often anticipating potential difficulties, risks, or challenges before taking action.

**Group work** - If they do not know anyone in a newly formed group, they may struggle to interact and participate. Ensuring that at least one familiar child is included can ease their integration and involvement. Starting with pairs and gradually increasing the group size can be an effective strategy to help them become comfortable with group interaction step by step.

**Changing seats in the classroom** - If their seat is changed and they find themselves next to new classmates, they may feel disoriented and unsettled for the rest of the day - and sometimes even in the days that follow.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Gently encourage and support

Offer new stimuli, experiences, opportunities, and challenges without forcing the child. Encourage them gently, involve them gradually, and allow them to engage at their own pace, without pressure or expectations. Reassure them and communicate confidence in their abilities. Whenever possible, help set them up for success, so that early attempts do not become discouraging or overwhelming.



DO NOT: demand too much, force participation, judge, ridicule, embarrass them and avoid comparing them to others or labeling them as “shy”



By doing so, you will prevent them from feeling even more wrong or different, while increasing their self-confidence and willingness to explore new experiences

At the same time, respond to their emotional needs, helping them feel safe and supported by accepting, acknowledging, and respecting their insecurities, fears, and limits - without overprotecting them.



The attention and sensitivity of educators and teachers toward the child's needs foster their sense of security, supporting their ability to participate actively, explore, and take risks

#### Routine and predictability

They need a structured and calm environment, with rituals, reassurance, consistent routines, and predictability.



Prepare them gradually for changes and new experiences - such as the next day's schedule, trips or special events, transitions between activities or rooms, group changes, a new teacher, joining a class, or the arrival of a new child in the group



You will provide them with points of reference, shielding them from unexpected stress, making it easier for them to adapt and reducing potential difficulties



## 1- Greater depth of information processing

### CHALLENGES

#### Tendency Toward Perfectionism and Self-Criticism

- They feel the weight of failure, mistakes, or errors more intensely, as they hold high expectations for themselves. They may struggle to accept not succeeding, often leading to self-devaluation and frustration, and frequently resist receiving help
- They are often caught in an inner conflict between the part of themselves striving for perfection and the part that reacts to excessive demands by giving up or resigning. They may also perceive that a task involves more than what is being asked of them

### EXAMPLES

**The weight of a mistake** - In class, they put in great effort to avoid making mistakes or forgetting something, striving to do things correctly — for example, rereading their work multiple times to ensure it is error-free. If they do make a mistake, their embarrassment and distress are often evident. They may become very upset and even give up activities they usually enjoy.

**Excessive Expectations** - When they struggle with a task, they can become very frustrated and respond to excessive demands with resignation, often saying things like, “I’m not able,” or “I’ll never manage”.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Responsive approach and positive reinforcement

Adopt a responsive approach full of understanding and patience, helping the child reflect calmly and clearly on their mistakes and setbacks (e.g., “Made a mistake? Don’t worry, it happens to everyone, even me”).

Use positive reinforcement to help them recognize when their work is good enough and to learn to see mistakes as opportunities for learning and personal growth.



**DO NOT:** minimize, judge, ridicule, embarrass, or compare them to others.



By doing so, you will prevent them from feeling even more wrong or different, while boosting their self-confidence, self-esteem, and willingness to try new things.

#### Self-compassion

Help children develop self-compassion and understand the importance of treating themselves with kindness, understanding, and patience - especially when facing challenges or making mistakes. This means recognizing that everyone struggles (the so-called “common humanity”) and that imperfection is part of being human - that they are not alone in their difficulties.

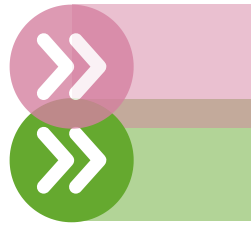
Teach them that, instead of judging themselves harshly, they can engage in a supportive inner dialogue, similar to the one they would offer to a dear friend.



## 1- Greater depth of information processing

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### STRENGTHS

#### Wide-ranging perception, depth and longer information processing times

- Strong observational skills, marked curiosity, creativity, and a vivid imagination
- Heightened attention to detail, enabling a deeper understanding of the world and a broader overall perspective, supporting strong problem-solving skills through reflective thinking
- Greater awareness of opportunities and the ability to anticipate the consequences of actions
- Ease in engaging with abstract themes and “philosophical” questions, supported by a rich inner world
- The capacity to consider multiple perspectives through deep and careful reflection
- Strong self-awareness and environmental awareness
- A tendency to respect rules, especially when they are shared and understood
- Good memory
- A powerful joy for life, as they derive great pleasure even from small things and are easily inspired, amazed, and filled with wonder

### EXAMPLES

#### A five-year-old child:

**Keen Observations** – “How come, if our nose is between our two eyes, we don’t see a hole when we look at things?”

**Deep Reflections** – “I don’t want to grow up, because if I grow up, you and Dad will get old and die, and I’ll be left alone.”

**Profound Questions** – “Where do people go when they die?” “Why do people go to war?”



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Promote a calm and thoughtful discipline

From an educational perspective, highlight and value their well-developed reflective abilities and depth of thought, making the most of moments of classroom discussion and shared dialogue. Promote a calm and thoughtful form of discipline based on reasoning, encouraging a critical and constructive approach. Involve them actively in shaping the rules, so that these become shared agreements rather than imposed constraints - benefiting the entire group.



**ASSERTIVENESS** - You will help them develop assertiveness by giving them opportunities to express their opinions and encouraging them to explain their reasons, even when these differ from those of others

#### Value and encourage their talents

Provide space for creative activities where they can freely express their vivid imagination.



Be patient when they explore their ideas or share their answers. At times these may seem unrelated, but they are often connected to deeper reflections on the topic

Encourage and support them in developing the talents, passions, strengths, and abilities they naturally display and feel enthusiastic about. Occasionally invite them to take on the role of “teacher” or lead an activity in an area where they typically excel.



**SELF-ESTEEM AND PROTECTION FROM OVER-ADAPTATION** - Recognizing their sometimes exceptional abilities provides an important boost to their self-esteem. By guiding them to follow and develop their own passions, you help ensure a fulfilling and balanced life. Teaching them to choose what suits them best protects them from over-adapting - from the tendency to meet others’ expectations at the expense of their own intuition, perspective, and bodily awareness.





## 1- Greater depth of information processing

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



## LEARNING SPACES

**Creative activities and experiences with art and nature** - Provide spaces for listening to or making music, with walls or areas where they can freely express their creativity and imagination. Whenever possible, offer outdoor spaces that allow direct contact with nature.



## EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

### **Promoting a loving, supportive environment and building positive relationships**

Use positive reinforcement, such as smiles and emotional rewards through encouraging words. Providing a secure foundation in your relationship with them is essential for healthy and harmonious growth across all areas of development. This support allows them to explore both the external and internal world and fosters socially appropriate behaviors that promote positive relationships - a fundamental aspect of overall well-being and success in life.

## STRENGTHS

### **Responsive to loving and supportive care**

- Compared to less sensitive children, highly sensitive children benefit more from a caring, supportive, attentive, positive, harmonious, and collaborative environment. They are strongly influenced by the sense that help is available when needed, as they are more aware of the level of support and affection provided by caregivers. The way they are cared for has a greater impact on their emotional state and sense of security. Understanding and valuing the quality of the teacher-child relationship is crucial, as it can predict the child's behavior and academic success in the years to come.



## 2- Tendency to overstimulation

### CHALLENGES

- Highly sensitive children are more prone to feeling overwhelmed by excessive stimulation. Their emotional intensity can make them feel overloaded even in positive or enjoyable environments that nonetheless produce overstimulation, or in situations where stimuli are less intense but longer-lasting
- They are at greater risk of fatigue in new, crowded, noisy, chaotic, brightly lit, socially complex, or highly demanding situations that require sustained concentration
- They generally dislike being observed or placed at the center of attention. When watched, they may become restless or freeze, performing below their true abilities. All of this can cause stress and leave them feeling exhausted afterward
- They may have tantrums or outbursts of anger to avoid situations that irritate or overwhelm them, or as a reaction to overstimulation. Others, however, may try not to cause problems, becoming obedient, quiet, or withdrawn, hoping not to be noticed or expected to do more than they can. They often experience physical symptoms, such as frequent headaches or stomachaches, which can serve as a way to rest and disengage. Pain or discomfort may be a genuine response to distressing situations and should not automatically be interpreted as attention-seeking.

### STRENGTHS

They can be seen as “sentinels” of their environment, as their heightened sensitivity allows them to detect subtle changes and anticipate potential problems, critical situations (such as conflicts or arguments), and dangers affecting everyone, effectively acting as an early warning system.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Balanced environment

Adjust stimuli, demands, and expectations according to the child’s high sensitivity. Alternate stimulation and rest, novelty and routine, social interaction and solitude, encouragement and protection, autonomy and support:

- Set limits: avoid overloading the day with too many activities.
- Include breaks between activities, allowing time for themselves.
- Enforce shared rules while creating a positive, calm, cooperative, and minimally competitive environment that avoids unfairness or inequality.
- Offer experiences and activities that are neither overly stimulating nor understimulating.
- Avoid observing them too closely or putting them at the center of attention. Facilitate interaction in small groups or with just a few peers at a time.
- Take into account heightened sensory and bodily experiences that may lead to overstimulation: be mindful of sensitivities to smells, sounds, images, lights, tactile sensations, tastes, fabrics, clothing labels or seams, heat, or cold.
- Prepare them gradually for changes or new experiences.
- Watch for signs of overstimulation in younger children, such as nasal sounds, sucking noises, wrinkled nose, sneezing, bored expression, raised upper lip, yawning, half-closed or closed eyelids, hiccups, fixed gaze, turning the head away, whimpering, or appearing tired.



**AROUSAL LEVEL** - By creating a calibrated environment, you will help regulate their level of arousal: all children feel better and learn more effectively when their arousal level is optimal



Responses to overstimulation can be either externalized or internalized



## 2- Tendency to overstimulation

### EXAMPLES

**Starting primary school** - The transition to first grade is a major change. The child must get to know a new teacher, a new environment, and new classmates. They are faced with new forms of assessment; rules and daily routines change. They are required to sit for much longer periods of time, sustain greater levels of concentration, and have fewer opportunities to release tension. Break times can feel chaotic, as they are often characterized by the presence of many loud and energetic children. In addition, the large amount of stimulation they receive throughout the day, together with their strong sense of responsibility, tendency toward perfectionism, fear of making mistakes, and sensitivity to judgment, can quickly lead the child to feel overwhelmed and exhausted. As a result, they may show clear signs of fatigue, agitation, irritability, or confusion. They may complain of headaches or stomach aches and explicitly ask for time to rest.

**Under Observation** - When observed while completing a task or during an oral assessment, a highly sensitive child may freeze or become distressed, performing below their abilities. Even well-intentioned attention from a teacher or educator can unintentionally increase their level of arousal. It helps to avoid prolonged direct eye contact and to refrain from pressing them with insistent questions. Instead, start by sharing your own experiences or opinions and give them time to respond. If they do not answer, do not draw attention to it; move on gently or offer a possible response, allowing the child to regain composure. Ensure that silences are comfortable and avoid commenting on their difficulties.

**Chaotic Environments and Intense Noise** - Break time can become particularly challenging for a highly sensitive child, as noisy and crowded environments may cause agitation and disorientation. You may notice that, in an effort to avoid overstimulation, the child chooses not to join group play, withdraws to a quieter space, hides, or prefers to stay close to the educator or teacher. At times, they may even cover their ears to shield themselves from the intensity of loud voices and playground noise.

**Bullying and Teasing** - Because highly sensitive children tend to become emotionally affected and easily overwhelmed, they may be more vulnerable to teasing or bullying. Support the child in navigating these challenges and help prevent such behaviors from arising by fostering a classroom culture grounded in acceptance, respect, and appreciation of individual differences.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### LEARNING SPACES

- **Sensory Stimulation** - (Visual, Auditory, Olfactory) Spaces should be calm and free from overcrowding or chaos. Create organized environments with shelves and designated areas for tidying toys and educational materials, and allow time for this to be done in a relaxed, unhurried way. A well-ordered space helps soothe defensive responses, and in general, harmony and aesthetic appeal contribute to a calming atmosphere. Rooms should not be overly bright; use soft, indirect lighting and gentle, neutral colors. Pay attention to low-frequency sounds such as ventilation fans, traffic noise, or loud voices, and try to minimize them. Noisy educational environments increase tension and reactivity in everyone. Regularly ventilate rooms and monitor indoor temperature.
- **Provide more secluded areas** such as cozy corners, tents, or small tables for individual or small-group work. These spaces allow children to retreat, rest, and step away from group activity to recover calm and energy.
- **Strategies to Regain Calm** - Encourage practices that help children restore calm and reduce anxiety, such as: mindfulness exercises, walking in nature, paying attention to diaphragmatic breathing.
- **Motor Experience** - Create indoor and outdoor spaces and allow as many opportunities as possible for the child to freely express their body and strength, without suppressing their liveliness. Supporting activities that involve physical strength can be very beneficial, as strength-based play provides stimuli that help organize and regulate the nervous system. Spaces should offer safety but also the possibility to experiment freely with movement. A room with mats, cushions, and foam balls to roll on or lie down, rubber tubes to hit on cushions for venting energy, a soft area to dive and jump. Outdoor spaces where they can run freely and unleash themselves in the ways they prefer to release accumulated tension.



## 2- Tendency to overstimulation

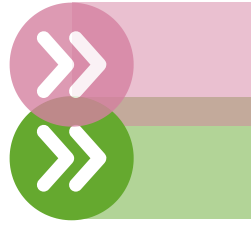
### CHALLENGES

#### Emotionality

- They experience frequent emotional peaks and express their emotions intensely in response to both positive and negative experiences, often having difficulty managing strong feelings
- They remember and continue to talk about specific emotionally intense experiences even after a long time
- Due to their heightened awareness, they may cry or become moved easily, even over small disappointments
- They respond and react strongly, becoming incredibly sad or angry, to criticism, injustice, failure, frustration, or when under pressure
- They may feel guilty even when there is no reason to
- They show fatigue through crying or aggression
- Their body reflects their emotional state: they may become restless in response to emotionally tense situations or moments of great joy, expressing through their body what they feel. Alternatively, depending on their personality, they may become frozen or withdrawn, trying not to show their feelings—but their facial expressions still clearly reveal that they are experiencing something particularly intense. In any case, changes in their movements, actions, and expressions are always noticeable

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Self-Empathy

Support children in developing healthy self-empathy. Being aware of and understanding their own thoughts, emotions, feelings, needs, and bodily sensations provides the foundation for strong self-esteem, effective communication, and the ability to be attentive to the needs of others.



**SELF-PERCEPTION** – It is the foundation of a person's health and overall balance

#### Assertiveness

Children should be supported in developing the ability to express their emotions, thoughts, opinions, and needs clearly and effectively, without harming others. This involves managing defensive reactions in relationships with others and with the surrounding world, mastering their instinctive, cognitive, and emotional experiences, and functioning more efficiently in social contexts.

How? By guiding and supporting them in regulating their emotions so that they feel safe exploring their inner world. Younger children do not yet have the ability to self-regulate emotionally; adults act as their emotional regulators. Sensitive children need to feel the emotional stability of their educator or teacher - the ability to manage and contain one's own emotions in relation to the child - showing them that the adult can take care of their own emotions and, therefore, is able to welcome the child's emotions as well. The educator should accept and validate the child's emotions by verbalizing and naming the feelings and sensations that arise through:

- **Emotional Literacy** – Teaching children to verbalize and name their emotions and sensations, including through play, to help them recognize and accept their emotional state. Educators and teachers should make a daily effort to talk about their own emotional states as well, modeling this behavior for the children.





## 2- Tendency to overstimulation

### EXAMPLES

**Conflicts in the classroom** - The child may vividly remember and continue to talk about a specific situation or emotionally intense experience — whether positive or negative — even long after it has occurred. In the classroom, they tend to experience peer conflicts deeply and may be affected by them for an extended period, continuing to dwell on the event even after the situation has been resolved. They may also feel significant discomfort when they are not directly involved but witness other children arguing or shouting. Even observing conflict can be distressing. In such moments, the child may alert the teacher, educator, or other classmates, or choose to withdraw from the situation altogether, as the intensity of the conflict can feel overwhelming and unsettling.

**Sudden and apparently unjustified emotional reactions** - When faced with a child's intense emotional reactions or moments of significant distress, educators and teachers often look for a triggering event that occurred shortly before the outburst. However, in a highly sensitive child, a strong emotional response may not be linked to a single immediate cause. Instead, it can result from the accumulation of multiple stimuli — such as repeated requests from the teacher, bright lights, noise, lack of breaks, or insufficient rest. Even if each stimulus seems minor on its own, their persistence over time can lead to overstimulation. Understanding this cumulative process helps adults respond with greater empathy and adjust the environment, rather than searching only for a single, recent trigger.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

- **Active Listening** – support the child in emotional regulation. Be fully present. Lower yourself to the child's eye level to ensure they feel heard, are able to listen in order to learn, and experience safety within the relationship. Welcome and respect the emotions the child is experiencing by using a calm tone and a low, gentle voice. Avoid trying to change or suppress their emotional state. Validate the mixed or conflicting feelings that may arise from their experiences, without telling them what they should feel. Refrain from statements such as “stop crying,” “nothing happened,” or “you're overreacting”. Allow emotions to surface, to be felt, and to be expressed freely. Give the child the time they need for these emotions to naturally subside. Remain calm and steady. Do not react impulsively to the child's emotional outbursts.
- **Emotional Mirroring** – position yourself as a secure emotional base for the child. Offer possible interpretations of their emotional state to help them feel seen, heard, understood, and truly acknowledged. Use phrases such as, “You seem very angry,” “You know, that has happened to me too,” or “If that had happened to me, I would have felt very sad — is that how you're feeling?”. Support the child in recognizing and naming their emotions, and help normalize even conflicting or mixed feelings, conveying that it is natural and acceptable to experience more than one emotion at the same time.
- **Physical Contact** – maintain steady, grounding contact with the child, if they are receptive to it. Offer physical containment by holding them, cuddling them, or placing a firm, reassuring hand on their shoulder to communicate safety and calm. If physical closeness is not welcomed, respect their need for space while remaining available. Avoid reacting impulsively. Do not raise your voice, and do not show fear in response to their reactions. Your calm and steady presence will help the child feel less frightened by their own emotions and less “wrong” for experiencing them.



## 2- Tendency to overstimulation

### STRENGTHS

#### Emotionality

- They experience positive emotions — such as joy, happiness, curiosity, satisfaction, and desire - with greater intensity
- They are more receptive and responsive to emotional support
- In an educational environment where they are emotionally engaged, they tend to learn a great deal - often more deeply and extensively than their less sensitive peers

#### Empathy

- They often display altruistic and prosocial behavior and show a remarkably high level of empathy. They are quick to perceive how others are feeling, even when those feelings are not openly expressed. This deep sensitivity to others' emotional states can lead them to worry about the difficulties or distress experienced by those around them.

### EXAMPLES

**Empathy** - When another child is crying, they may stop playing to observe and analyze the situation, trying to understand whether everything is alright. They may also attempt to include a child who is standing apart or feeling left out. They are often able to recognize when a teacher, educator, or peer is feeling sad, angry, disappointed, or upset - even when these emotions are not openly expressed through obvious behavior - and may ask thoughtful questions such as, "Are you sad?", "Did something happen?", or "Do you need anything?". If a friend is feeling sad, they frequently experience sadness themselves, deeply resonating with the other child's emotional state.

**Learning-friendly environments** - During classroom activities, a highly sensitive child's intense joy or enthusiasm can sometimes spread throughout the entire group. Their genuine excitement may become contagious, energizing the class and nurturing a creative, positive, and collaborative atmosphere. When supported appropriately, this emotional intensity can act as a powerful catalyst, fostering an environment that is engaging, connected, and highly conducive to learning.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

**Nurture and celebrate their sensitivity** - Value and cultivate their ability to find deep joy and pleasure in even the smallest things. Appeal to their emotions, feelings, and inner sense of wonder, inspiring awe and curiosity, and encourage them to explore these experiences. Involving the entire group in these moments can help foster a positive classroom atmosphere - one that promotes enthusiasm, curiosity, and, ultimately, meaningful learning.

**Emotional Intelligence** - Explicitly nurture and reinforce empathetic and sensitive behaviors within the entire group. By doing so, you strengthen children's social and emotional skills, enhancing their emotional intelligence — a vital foundation for forming positive and constructive relationships, building lasting friendships, and encouraging prosocial, cooperative behaviors.



**EMPATHY** - Empathy is a skill that can be learned - and therefore taught. It promotes prosocial behavior, helps prevent social exclusion and marginalization, and encourages inclusivity



## 4- Sensitivity and ability to notice details and subtleties

### CHALLENGES

#### Stronger sensory and physical experiences

They may experience stronger sensory input and more intense negative sensations from the information they perceive through their five senses and their physical awareness. They may be disturbed by smells - avoiding certain foods, finding certain fragrances nauseating, or noticing stale air in poorly ventilated spaces. Loud or harsh noises, bright lights, or intense visual stimuli can be overwhelming. They may react strongly to tactile sensations, such as unpleasant textures in food, clothing fabrics, tags, or seams. Extreme temperatures - too hot or too cold - can also be particularly uncomfortable. These children are often more aware of pain and bodily sensations. They may also experience hunger and thirst more acutely, showing stronger reactions and lower tolerance when food or drink is delayed.

#### More sensitive to contradictory messages and hidden information

- They notice inconsistencies between what is said to them and what they perceive, interpreting nonverbal cues such as posture, tone of voice, and facial expressions. As a result, they are more sensitive to lies or unspoken messages
- They perceive reactions, irritations, discomfort, any denied contact, doubts, or even the slightest hint of rejection. They can detect subtle details, such as moods that adults try to conceal, and notice small changes in others' emotional states. They absorb tensions in their environment easily and often struggle to manage them, especially those arising within the family

### STRENGTHS

#### More sensitive to subtle cues

- They have excellent intuition; sometimes they just "know" things without understanding why
- They can also sense the emotional atmosphere of an environment, are highly perceptive, and may notice potential problems before others

#### They observe even the smallest details and slightest changes in their surroundings

- They are excellent problem solvers

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

that balances stimuli, demands, and expectations in line with this trait



### EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

#### Observe to prevent overstimulation

Take into account their heightened sensory and bodily experiences, which can lead to overstimulation. Notice if they are bothered by scents, sounds, visuals, lights, tactile sensations, tastes, fabrics, clothing tags or seams, temperature (heat or cold), or pain.



DO NOT: underestimate their pain or bodily sensations, force them to eat, or make them wait excessively for food and water.

#### Authenticity

They need authenticity. Educators and teachers should be as genuine and transparent as possible, as highly sensitive children pick up on inconsistencies between verbal and non-verbal cues. They are more affected by contradictory messages and hidden information. Always tell the truth, and avoid lying, while adjusting the level of detail based on their age.



It is important not to lie, as doing so may cause them to doubt their own perception and intuition.

#### Value their intuition

Recognizing their sometimes exceptional abilities is an important boost to their self-esteem.

0-3



## CHALLENGES

- Tendency to overstimulation
- Wide-ranging perception, depth, and longer processing times of information
- Emotionality, tendency to react in an amplified way
- Stronger sensory and bodily experiences, with heightened sensations
- Difficulty adapting to new situations, new groups, and changes
- Tendency toward perfectionism and self-criticism, fear of making mistakes and failing
- Susceptibility to social and time pressures
- More affected by contradictory messages and hidden information

## NEEDS

- Protection from overstimulation
- Loving care, positive and secure relationships, authenticity
- Affectionate contact, presence, and deep listening
- Moments of rest and/or break
- Opportunities to release energy
- Emotional support, empathy
- Predictability and shared rules
- Boosts to self-esteem
- Social inclusion, friendships

3-6



## CHALLENGES

- Tendency to overstimulation
- Wide-ranging perception, depth, and longer processing times of information
- Emotionality, tendency to react in an amplified way
- Difficulty adapting to new situations, new groups, and changes
- Susceptibility to social and time pressures
- Tendency toward perfectionism and self-criticism, fear of making mistakes and failing
- Stronger sensory and bodily experiences, with heightened sensations
- More affected by contradictory messages and hidden information

## NEEDS

- Protection from overstimulation
- Loving care, positive and secure relationships, authenticity
- Emotional support, empathy
- Predictability and shared rules
- Boosts to self-esteem
- Moments of rest and/or break
- Opportunities to release energy
- Social inclusion, friendships
- Affectionate contact, presence, and deep listening

# Needs of highly sensitive children

High sensitivity manifests differently across age groups, highlighting different needs at each stage of development

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT - ages 0-3

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- **Observation and presence:** recognizing and responding to their needs by establishing positive relationships, offering a presence that can **help them make sense of their life experiences, including emotional ones**. Offering authenticity and emotional support, ensuring they feel welcomed, thus **creating a harmonious environment and a secure attachment** that promotes learning and enhances the social skills of the entire group.
- **Protection from overstimulation:**
  - **take into account their heightened sensory and bodily experiences**, which can lead to overstimulation. Assess whether they are bothered by smells, sounds, images, lights, tactile sensations, tastes, fabrics, clothing tags and seams, or by heat and cold. Do not underestimate their pain or the sensations of their body. Consider that they feel hunger and thirst more intensely and tolerate waiting for food less.
  - **Offer a calibrated environment: regulate stimuli, demands, and expectations in light of this trait.** Alternate stimulation and withdrawal, novelty and routine, social interaction and solitude, encouragement and protection, autonomy and support. Pay particular attention when a new child is introduced to the group.
  - **Create spaces to regain calm:** dens, tents, cozy corners, small tables where children can work alone or in small groups, allowing them to retreat, rest, and step away from group involvement to recover calmness and energy when needed.
  - **Create spaces for motor experiences:** provide as many opportunities as possible for the child to freely express their body and strength without suppressing their liveliness. A room with mats, cushions, and foam balls to roll or lie on; rubber tubes to hit against cushions to vent energy; a soft area to dive and jump. Outdoor spaces where they can run freely and release tension in the ways they prefer.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT - ages 3-6

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- **Observation and presence:** recognizing and responding to their needs by **establishing positive relationships, offering authenticity and emotional support**, ensuring they feel welcomed, thus creating a safe environment that promotes learning and enhances the social skills of the entire class.
- **Protection from overstimulation:** monitor the child's arousal and attention levels, considering **possible sources of disturbance** such as noise, lights, sensory and bodily experiences, classroom chaos, or excessive emotional activation from students that may lead to conflicts. Provide children with a **quiet space where they can rest**, such as a tent or a comfortable, secluded area for reading books.
- **Self-empathy:** help the child develop **awareness and perception of their thoughts, feelings, needs, and bodily sensations through deep listening:** the teacher must be fully present with verbal and non-verbal attention when the child shares something, listening without interrupting, judging, advising, questioning, minimizing, disapproving, interpreting, embarrassing, ensuring the child feels welcomed in their reflections and **creating a sharing connection** that allows them to freely express perceptions, thoughts, concerns, fears, pain, and tears. Feeling listened to, protected, and accepted will enhance their positive sense of self and teach them to listen to themselves, increasing awareness of their feelings, moods, emotions, and needs.
- **Emotional regulation and literacy:** support the child in regulating their emotions so that they feel accompanied and safe while exploring their inner world. Teach them to verbalize and name emotions and sensations, including through play, to help them recognize and accept their emotional state.
- **Provide a structured and predictable program** with clear behavioral expectations and **shared rules. Anticipate possible new activities and schedule changes. Balance encouragement and protection.**

6-8



## CHALLENGES

- Tendency to overstimulation
- Wide-ranging perception, depth, and longer processing times of information
- Susceptibility to social and time pressures
- Emotionality, tendency to react in an amplified way
- Tendency toward perfectionism and self-criticism, fear of making mistakes and failing
- Difficulty adapting to new situations, new groups, and changes
- More affected by contradictory messages and hidden information
- Stronger sensory and bodily experiences, with heightened sensations

## NEEDS

- Protection from overstimulation
- Predictability and shared rules
- Loving care, positive and secure relationships, authenticity
- Boosts to self-esteem
- Moments of rest and/or break
- Emotional support, empathy
- Social inclusion, friendships
- Opportunities to release energy
- Affectionate contact, presence, and deep listening

8-11



## CHALLENGES

- Tendency to overstimulation
- Susceptibility to social and time pressures
- Tendency toward perfectionism and self-criticism, fear of making mistakes and failing
- More affected by contradictory messages and hidden information
- Emotionality, tendency to react in an amplified way
- Wide-ranging perception, depth, and longer processing times of information
- Difficulty adapting to new situations, new groups, and changes
- Stronger sensory and bodily experiences, with heightened sensations

## NEEDS

- Protection from overstimulation
- Social inclusion, friendships
- Boosts to self-esteem
- Loving care, positive and secure relationships, authenticity
- Emotional support, empathy
- Predictability and shared rules
- Moments of rest and/or break
- Opportunities to release energy
- Affectionate contact, presence, and deep listening

# Needs of highly sensitive children

High sensitivity manifests differently across age groups, highlighting different needs at each stage of development

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT - ages 6-8

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- **Protection from overstimulation:** monitor students' arousal and attention levels, considering **possible sources of disturbance** such as noise, lights, sensory and bodily experiences, classroom chaos, or excessive emotional activation that may lead to conflicts. Provide children with a **quiet space where they can calm down and reduce overstimulation**.
- **Create small work groups** and place them with children they already know or interact with, to help them be more active and engaged in the activities. **Balance encouragement and protection**.
- Provide a **structured and predictable program** with clear behavioral expectations and shared rules. **Anticipate possible new activities and schedule changes**.
- **Create a welcoming and supportive environment** that provides **positive feedback based on their efforts** rather than on achieved goals (such as smiles and emotional rewards through encouraging words), **allowing them more time to engage in new activities, formulate responses, participate in a conversation, or contribute in class**. Adopt a **responsive approach** full of understanding and patience, helping the child to reflect calmly and clearly on mistakes and setbacks.
- Observe, recognize, and **respond to their needs by establishing positive relationships, offering authenticity and emotional support**, ensuring they feel welcomed, thus creating a safe environment that promotes learning and enhances the social and empathetic skills of the entire class.
- **Create a collaborative environment and a positive classroom climate** that supports greater learning, through shared rules and by leveraging their heightened empathic abilities and their tendency to be moved, amazed, and inspired.
- **Utilize their reflective and analytical skills, depth of thought, and pronounced creativity in common moments of sharing and reflection**. Help them express and develop their interests, passions, opinions, and points of view.

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT - ages 8-11

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- **Protection from overstimulation:** monitor students' arousal and attention levels, considering **possible sources of disturbance** such as noise, lights, sensory and bodily experiences, classroom chaos, or excessive emotional activation that may lead to conflicts.
- **Pay attention to their sense of belonging versus feelings of rejection and loneliness**. Monitor any acts of bullying and try to prevent them by promoting a classroom environment where differences are welcomed, accepted, and respected. If necessary, help them form friendships - even one good friend can be enough.
- **Adopt a responsive approach full of understanding and patience, helping the child to reflect calmly and clearly on mistakes and setbacks**. Teach them to view errors as opportunities for learning and personal growth, and to understand the importance of treating themselves with kindness, understanding, and patience.
- **Leverage their reflective and analytical skills, depth of thought, pronounced creativity, and sense of social justice in shared moments of collaboration and reflection**. Help them express and develop their interests, passions, opinions, and points of view.
- Create a **welcoming and supportive environment** that provides **positive and realistic feedback** based on their efforts and growth process rather than on achieved goals (such as smiles and emotional rewards through encouraging words), **allowing them more time to engage in new activities, formulate responses, participate in a conversation, or contribute in class**.
- Observe, recognize, and **respond to their needs by establishing positive relationships**, offering authenticity and emotional support, ensuring they feel welcomed, thus **creating a safe environment** that promotes learning and enhances the social and empathetic skills of the entire class.
- **Create a collaborative environment** and a positive classroom climate that supports greater learning, through shared rules and by leveraging their heightened empathic abilities and their tendency to be moved, amazed, and inspired.

**Every temperament needs - and has the right to - an environment where it can thrive.** A good fit (goodness of fit) is achieved when an educational environment supports and encourages children's natural ways of behaving. **Adaptation is always positive when educators and teachers accept children as they are and adjust their methods accordingly, rather than expecting the children to change** [6].

In order to approach and interpret the attitudes and behaviors of highly sensitive children more neutrally - avoiding personal biases and labeling - educators and teachers first need to work on themselves if they struggle in their interactions, gaining a better understanding of how their own temperament can influence the relationship and create unrealistic expectations [27].

## AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

**An environment that meets the needs of highly sensitive children benefits all children - no one is excluded** [9]



## CHERISH THEM FOR WHO THEY ARE

Not feeling accepted and valued for who they are, feeling rejected ("you are not good enough as you are"), creates a first major challenge for these children. Nothing escapes their notice when it comes to our responses toward them, and as a result, they often feel "too much" or "not enough." All children, including highly sensitive ones, have the right to exist as they are, not as we wish them to be.

**Do not ask them to conform to the majority**, to change who they are, do not try to forge them, and do not push them to become "stronger"! **Because when we ask them to change and adapt, we are suppressing their high sensitivity, turning it into an obstacle to their very existence** [21].

*"The word educate comes from the Latin 'ex-ducere', which literally means 'to draw out'. In other words, it is about helping children uncover and bring forth what is already naturally within them, rather than trying to 'put in' what we think they should have."*

**Elena Lupo**

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# WHAT DO HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILDREN NEED?

They require a balanced and supportive educational environment



Like orchids, **children with this trait flourish in the right environment**, which allows them to develop and express the strengths of being highly sensitive: depth of thought, intuition, creativity, empathy, enthusiasm, and attention to detail and to the needs of their peers. Highly sensitive children require more time, support, patience, understanding, balance, security, empathy, and presence.

**Sensitivityresearch.com** is a website designed and managed by leading experts and researchers in the field of high sensitivity. It was created to disseminate information and data from scientific studies and research on high sensitivity.

*Sensitivity*  
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## ONLINE INTERACTIVE LEARNING MODULE

**Sensitivityresearch.com** offers a one-hour online course designed for teachers and parents. It helps them understand highly sensitive children, their challenges and needs, and provides guidance on supporting them in school while nurturing their unique strengths.



This document has been sponsored by the following associations:



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