

# Factsheet 52

## Hypersensitivity & HSP's

Many children and young people (including high ability and gifted children and young people) are affected by hypersensitivity. They can be sensitive to a variety of differing situations and incidents, e.g. scratchy clothes, world issues, food, emotions and feelings. When we talk about hypersensitivity we are not talking about "normal" levels of sensitivity, we are talking sensitivities that are out of proportion and unable to be rationalised by the child, young person, adult, teacher or parent/carer. Things and situations will bother the individual so much that they may complain about something, asks endless questions, talk about the same subject for months, have night terrors and sleep apnoea and be emotionally distressed and anxious about certain things and situations. In other instances they may refuse to wear some form of clothing that feel scratchy, comment that the rain hurts their head, complain about the noise or light levels in the classroom or dining hall or find world news too distressing to read or watch.

<b>Sight</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finds the lights in the classroom uncomfortable</li> <li>• Dislikes the sun in their eyes</li> <li>• Likes to look at or watch certain things</li> <li>• Sometimes stares into space/daydreams</li> <li>• May get frequent headaches</li> </ul>	<p>Discuss the difficulties with the class teacher and try to encourage children to sit in a spot that is more comfortable for their eyes. Restrict and even avoid things like the computer, DS2, game boys etc.</p>
<b>Sound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finds the classroom too noisy</li> <li>• Dislikes fireworks and loud bangs</li> <li>• Has very heightened hearing</li> <li>• Obsessed with certain sounds, tones or particular music</li> <li>• May find comfort in rocking</li> </ul>	<p>Discuss with the school and try to encourage a quiet area, space and time during the school day. Be careful what you say or discuss around children with heightened hearing! Encourage a wide range of music and keep the sound down!</p>
<b>Taste</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes certain textures of food, e.g. too sloppy</li> <li>• Dislikes spicy food</li> <li>• Has an obsession with certain tastes</li> <li>• Allergies and/or intolerance to some foods</li> </ul>	<p>Don't force G&amp;T children to eat things they really don't like; more often than not, they are not being awkward.</p>
<b>Smell</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes unpleasant smells</li> <li>• Likes to sniff certain smells</li> <li>• Has a very heightened sense of smell</li> </ul>	<p>Discuss tolerance of nasty smells, e.g. the countryside. Encourage appropriate use of smelling things. Consider appropriateness of social situations.</p>
<b>Touch</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dislikes intensely tags in clothes, scratchy fabrics, and seams in socks</li> <li>• Dislike wool and fluffy fabrics</li> <li>• Dislike being touched and cuddled</li> <li>• Likes to stroke or touch certain textures and shapes</li> <li>• Rash may appear</li> </ul>	<p>G&amp;T children and young people really cannot stand scratchy or itchy fabrics; don't force them to wear them. Respect touchy feely boundaries, some G&amp;T children do not like too much touchy feely stuff others like lots. Consider appropriateness of social situations.</p>

### World Issues

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Some individuals may find the news, documentaries and world issues very difficult to deal with and certain topics and situations may worry them. From a very young age they may ask endless and very deep harrowing questions and appear not to be satisfied with the answers given. Some individuals can become extremely anxious and fearful in certain situations and with certain individuals they come into contact with. It is wise to restrict and monitor what sensitive children and young people watch on TV, see in the newspapers and hear you talking about. Topics like religion, war, death, poverty, racism and tragedies can cause upset to, and bother, young children and other individuals. Some may ask deep and probing question after question and not be satisfied with your answers for a very long time. Sometimes this can cause night terrors and sleeplessness.

## **Emotions and Feelings**

Many children, young people and adults are very sensitive individuals emotionally. Their feelings can be hurt quickly and deeply, they take things very much to heart and can feel very misunderstood. If hurt by friends they may become withdrawn, feel very isolated and sometimes become loners. Isolating themselves is one way of protecting themselves from the agonising discomfort they suffer from confrontation and upset with friends and family. Some may cry a lot and very easily. This particular type of personality will require a lot of patience, understanding and support. It's important to discuss emotions and feelings together whenever possible.

Hypersensitive children and young people can be difficult to understand and manage unless you understand the intensity of their heightened senses. It is important that you read as much about the difficulty as possible in order to ensure you are well informed.

Often hypersensitivity occurs from a very young age; as young as 2 years in some cases. You may notice that from a very young age a child has asked probing questions quite different to their peers, has an insatiable appetite for knowledge and understanding of the world around them and is very concerned with the wellbeing of the planet.

## **Highly Sensitive Persons**

Biologists have found that the brains of highly sensitive persons (HSP's) actually work a little differently than others, nevertheless the traits are normal and you are definitely not alone. HSP's are more aware of the subtleties around them due to the brain processing information and reflecting on it more deeply. You are easily overwhelmed and overstimulated when things become intense, complex and chaotic. HSP's tend to look before embarking on new situations or challenges and can be seen to be shy, introverted, fearful and inhibited even though as much as 30% of HSP's are extroverts. Remember in different upbringings and cultures sensitivity will be valued differently and often we are told not to be so sensitive which can create low self-esteem and confidence.

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