

Emotion

Potential of highly sensitivity

What is high sensitivity? The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment. Needs of highly sensitive children.

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Structure

The importance of the home environment for HS children

The potential consequences of the environment

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment

Needs of highly sensitive children

The importance of the environment for HS children

- The key role in the development of children, especially these who are highly sensitive, is played by their adult caregivers, people from the closest school and home environment, who should be conscious of individual children's differences and the biological basis of temperamental traits;
- Early identification of the trait is relevant in the context of the theory of "differential susceptibility" (Pluess & Belsky, 2010), a well-studied aspect of high sensitivity, which refers to the fact that highly sensitive people are greatly influenced by the environment in which they grow and live;

The importance of the environment for HS children

- Highly sensitive children are more strongly affected than others by both negative and positive experiences and environments.
- Highly sensitive children absorb more environmental information than other people, and that includes both the good and the bad;
- Absorbing information is tiring. It is a largely unconscious process that uses up a lot of energy.
- And when there is too much of it, such as constant noise, lots of people, and busy schedules, highly sensitive children become overwhelmed;

The importance of the environment for HS children

- Environments, in the context of sensory processing sensitivity, include:
 - the physical environment (e.g., food, sleep, medication);
 - the social environment (e.g., family dynamics, other people's mood, crowd),
 - sensory stimuli (e.g., auditory, olfactory, tactile, visual)
 - internal experiences (e.g., thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations such as hunger, pain).
- The sensitivity of HS children's nervous system to bright light, noise, touch, tissues and perfume and / or electromagnetic devices means that people with this trait need, in order to function well, a gentle environment that does not overload their nervous system.

The potential consequences of the environment

- Low and inadequate levels of parental care of highly sensitive children are directly linked to later incidences of depression (Miriam Liss et. al, 2005);
- Highly sensitive children develop and benefit from the positive effects of a supportive and empathetic environment, with much lower probabilities of developing anxiety and depression (Aron, 2010).

The potential consequences of the environment



- In aversive environments, where there is aggression, lack of acceptance and lack of support or neglect of emotional needs, these children are more prone to affective and behavioral disorders, compared to the majority who do not have the high sensitivity trait (Aaron, 2010).
- HS children are more severely affected than most, both by negative and positive experiences and environments.
- HSCs absorb much more information from the environment than others, and this becomes tiring and leads faster to overload.

The potential consequences of the environment



- The absence of a supportive physical and emotional environment will create physical imbalances, overload and stress in the body, which can turn into disease;
- In the environments where support and care are of high quality, HS children have the ability to flourish and may have better developmental trajectories than the least sensitive ones (eg, increased emotional well-being, greater social competence).

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment – DOES model

Depth of processing is translated in (Acevedo et al., 2014; Aron & Aron, 1997; Aron, 2002; Boterberg, Warryen, 2016):

- He is empathetic and sensitive in relationship to family members;
- He has vivid dreams and a rich imagination;
- He needs a longer processing time of new information compared to peers (brothers or friends);
- He asks "deep", thought-provoking questions and needs answers in order to feel safe;
- He has difficulties in making decisions due to considering too many options (which delays the choices he makes);

- he needs to observe the situation before participating in it;
- he has a slow adaptation to new people and situations that appear in the home environment;
- he has intensity in experiencing feelings – fear, joy, sadness, enthusiasm, and may appear as exaggerating things;
- he is paying attention to the less obvious elements of a situation that most family members do not pay attention to;
- he has awareness of the long-term consequences of own actions, which may appear as hesitation, and needs more time to react to situations;

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment – DOES model



- O – Ease of being overstimulated is translated in (Aron, 2002):
 - Having difficulties with falling or remaining asleep, waking up in the middle of the night;
 - Having acute reactions to change, he needs preparation and time to integrate the changes in his environment;
 - Intense reactions to noise, cold, heat, artificial light, discomfort (e.g. sand in a shoe, wet clothing, a scratchy label) so he needs attention for the physical comfort;
 - The need for his own space and prefers to play alone;
 - He doesn't like the house to be crowded;

- They may lose their tempers, fly into rages, avoid situations that overstimulate, irritate and overwhelm them;
- They may be very active at home, which gives the impression that they have attention deficits (however, their attention span is within the norm when they are not subjected to excessive stimulation);
- In critical situations, they may shout at others, some may withdraw, others somatise overstimulation through abdominal pain, headache or other physical symptoms.

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment – DOES model Erasmus+

- E – Emotional reactivity connected to empathy is translated in:
 - They react with greater emotional intensity to the stimuli – changes in the environment, physical discomfort, inappropriate approaches from the family members (Aron, Aron, Jagiellowicz, 2012);
 - They are able to feel the feelings of other family members and they are often emotionally overloaded because of this;
 - They are perfectionists, they try to satisfy caregivers and overreact even when making the smallest mistake;

The specificity of the functioning of highly sensitive children in the home environment – DOES model

- S – Sensitivity to subtle stimuli is translated in (Aron, 2002):
 - They notice every loving glance and return it;
 - They can tell when someone (brothers) needs something before the parents even thought about it;
 - They notice small details like: “There is some skin left on this apple”;
 - They pay attention to the changes in the environment or people and can be dusturbed by this;
 - They are affected by the changes in the tone of voice or the small gestures of the parents;

Needs of highly sensitive children

- Routine are important for highly sensitive children. Highly sensitive kids thrive on routine. There is a calm that comes with order and habits.
- Children feel secure and thrive when the environment is structured for them. Prioritize tasks and routines into steps — short and simple ones.
- A good night's sleep and healthy meals, spaced regularly throughout the day. A lack of sleep for a highly sensitive child can make life almost unbearable. Getting enough sleep helps soothe the highly sensitive child's ramped-up senses and allows her/him to process her/his emotions.

Needs of highly sensitive children

- Adequate support for the child allows for the understanding and treatment of sensitivity as a potential rather than a deficit or burden.
- They need more time to observe and react when just enter in a new group.
- They need to learn how to manage themselves not to be overwhelmed and how to use their capacity of analyzing the stimuli for better purpose and for their own development.

Needs of highly sensitive children

- Being perfectionists they may need more time for make a decision and explore the possibilities;
- Awareness of the child's resources allow us to manage both the upbringing and the educational process in such a way as to develop, broaden and
- Modify the child's resources, and not to focus on deficits or difficulties;
- Highly sensitive children may need their own space for reordering and recharge themselves or to be in touch to themselves.

Needs of highly sensitive children

- They need responses to their questions as well as to be away for a time from intense stimuli.
- Having more empathy and awareness they often get stressed or have low self-esteem if their home environment is chaotic or without a clear border for their own space and even if they are told not to be so sensitive.
- It is often for them to need their parents proximity as well as being alone. It is for parents to find a way to cope with uncertainty of not knowing if they respond enough to their children needs.

Needs of highly sensitive children

- Some of these children are perfectionists and have struggle in taking risks because they deeply process decisions.
- And some of them can act after listing some risks and using intuition to set the framework – when they have supportive parents who help them know themselves.

In summary

In order to support a highly sensitive child, parents should benefit of:

- Knowledge in the field of high sensitivity - traits and needs;
- Help to develop the parental competencies specific to raising a HSC;
- A good parent - teacher relationship;
- Access to specialists and support groups.



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!