

# A guide to a model of support for highly sensitive children of pre-school age (3-6/7) and early school age (6/7-10)

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**Project „E-MOTION - potential of hypersensitivity” 2018-1-PL01-KA201-051033**

## INTRODUCTION

### *What is the model for supporting highly sensitive children?*

The goal of the proposed model is to realise the assumption that:

*Sensitive pupils have the opportunity to utilize their full potential, as reflected in their creativity, intuition, astuteness, brilliance, life wisdom or empathy, and should not be perceived as deficient.*

Some highly sensitive children are excluded due to an initial diagnosis of disorders and deficits (identified as disturbed children, with attention deficits), some of them will begin to have their needs satisfied in a dysfunctional way.

### *Model characteristics*

This model is based on a systematic literature review from the areas of:

- ✓ **sensory processing sensitivity,**
- ✓ **environmental sensitivity,**

The content has been supplemented with knowledge from the areas of prevention and psychology of individual differences, as well as developmental psychology.

It is based on a positive approach (holistic, individual in the sense of humanistic psychology).

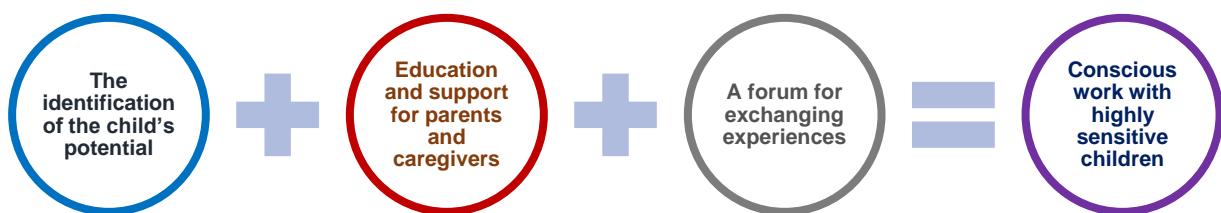
Sensory Processing Sensitivity (SPS) is understood here as a trait describing interpersonal differences in sensitivity to the environment, both positive and negative. High sensitivity can be both a risk factor for later psychological difficulties and a protective factor for regular child development (Baryła-Matejczuk, 2019).

A key role in the development of children, especially highly sensitive children, is played by their adult carers, the immediate school and home environment, which must be characterised

by an awareness of children's individual differences and of the biological basis of the subjective trait of sensory processing sensitivity.

Accordingly, an approach was developed to support highly sensitive children to achieve developmental tasks. The assumptions are illustrated in the diagram below:

*Fig.. 1. Supporting Highly Sensitive Children, elaborated by. M. Baryła-Matejczuk*



### *Who is the guide of the model addressed to?*

The guide has been developed to make it easier for parents and teachers to work with the highly sensitive child. The developed solutions in the form of materials and studies have been uploaded to the Internet platform. The guide is a tool that helps to navigate through the content of the platform.

### *What is the guide content?*

You will find here a prompt on:

- *What resources are available to you on the platform under the model*
- *Where to find them*
- *How to use them*
- *How to get additional support*

## *Guide overview*

The resources available under the model are divided into six separate thematic modules consistent with the proposed model of support:

### **IDENTIFYING THE CHILD'S POTENTIAL**

- 1) Identification - check if your child is highly sensitive

### **EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS**

- 2) What we know about high sensitivity
- 3) Podcasts
- 4) Video resources

### **FORUM FOR SHARING EXPERIENCES**

- 5) Forum

### **WORKING CONSCIOUSLY WITH HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILDREN**

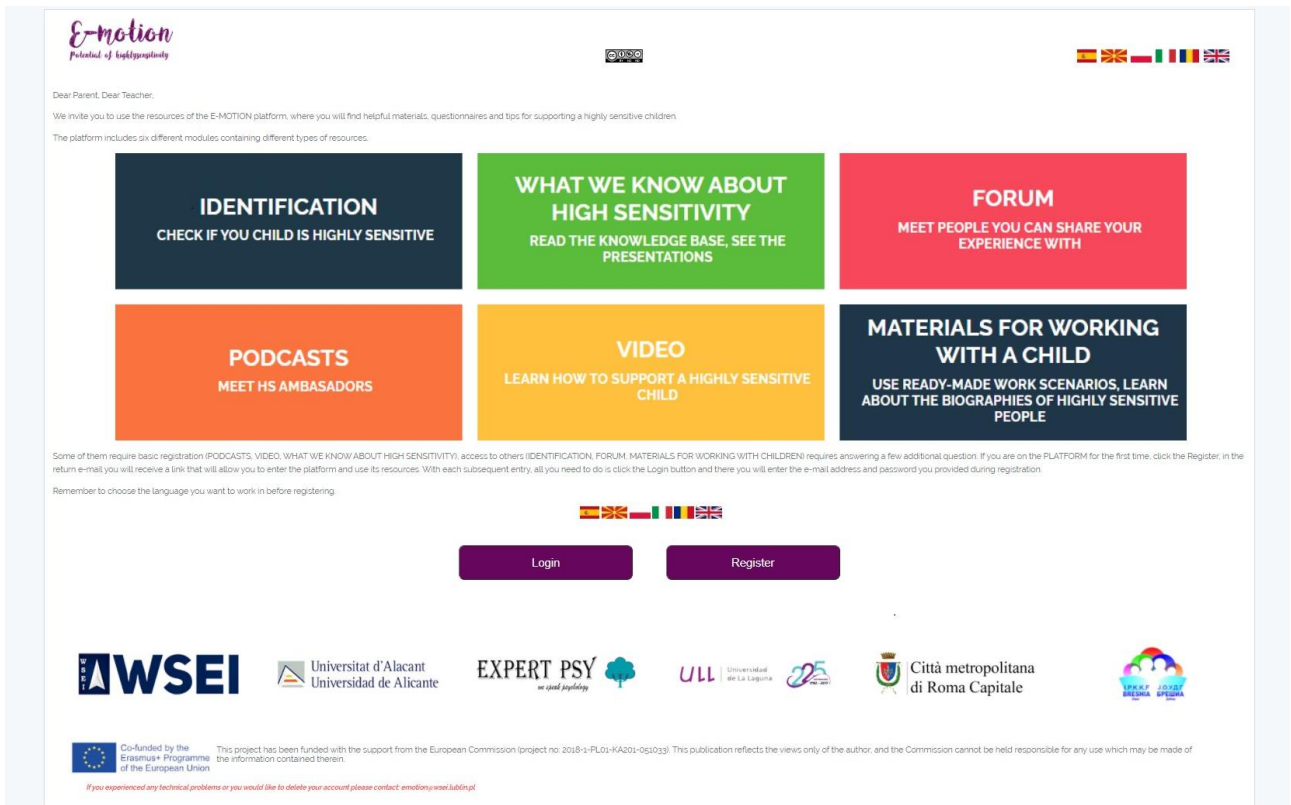
- 6) Resources for working with a highly sensitive child

The guide presents each thematic module in a sequential manner according to the scheme:

- *Where to find a thematic module ( URL)*
- *What is in the module*
- *What is the intended use of the materials in the block*
- *How the module resources can be applied (who can use them, in what form)*

## ACCESS TO RESOURCES - REGISTRATION AND LOGGING

Resources can be accessed once a parent/teacher has registered and logged in. An individual account provides access to materials designed for two groups of users - teachers and parents.



The screenshot shows the E-motion platform's registration and login interface. At the top, there's a header with the E-motion logo, a Creative Commons license icon, and flags for Spain, UK, Italy, and France. Below the header, a welcome message reads: "Dear Parent, Dear Teacher, We invite you to use the resources of the E-MOTION platform, where you will find helpful materials, questionnaires and tips for supporting a highly sensitive children. The platform includes six different modules containing different types of resources." The main content area features six colored boxes representing different modules: 1. IDENTIFICATION (CHECK IF YOUR CHILD IS HIGHLY SENSITIVE) in a dark blue box. 2. WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HIGH SENSITIVITY (READ THE KNOWLEDGE BASE, SEE THE PRESENTATIONS) in a green box. 3. FORUM (MEET PEOPLE YOU CAN SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH) in a pink box. 4. PODCASTS (MEET HS AMBASADORS) in an orange box. 5. VIDEO (LEARN HOW TO SUPPORT A HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILD) in a yellow box. 6. MATERIALS FOR WORKING WITH A CHILD (USE READY-MADE WORK SCENARIOS, LEARN ABOUT THE BIOGRAPHIES OF HIGHLY SENSITIVE PEOPLE) in a dark blue box. Below these boxes, a note states: "Some of them require basic registration (PODCASTS, VIDEO, WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HIGH SENSITIVITY), access to others (IDENTIFICATION, FORUM, MATERIALS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN) requires answering a few additional question. If you are on the PLATFORM for the first time, click the Register; in the return e-mail you will receive a link that will allow you to enter the platform and use its resources. With each subsequent entry, all you need to do is click the Login button and there you will enter the e-mail address and password you provided during registration. Remember to choose the language you want to work in before registering." At the bottom, there are "Login" and "Register" buttons, followed by a row of partner logos: WSEI, Universitat d'Alacant, EXPERT PSY, ULL, and Città metropolitana di Roma Capitale. A footer section includes the Erasmus+ logo and text: "Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. This project has been funded with the support from the European Commission (project no: 2018-1-PL01-KA201-051033). This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. If you experienced any technical problems or you would like to delete your account please contact: emotion@wsei.lublin.pl".

## IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL

In order to design support it is vital to first identify whether we are dealing with a highly sensitive child. The initial identification of temperament traits is often based on an analysis of behaviour, which in the case of highly sensitive children may be confused in the clinical picture with disorders such as hyperactivity, sensory integration disorders, among others. The use of a reliable, tailor-made tool for assessing high sensitivity (a questionnaire containing questions

about the child) should be the first step in the process of supporting highly sensitive children as well as their families and immediate environment. Therefore, the first activity oriented towards supporting highly sensitive children is to devise a tool (questionnaire), which can be used by both **parents** and **teachers** (Baryła-Matejczuk, 2019).

### *Where to find the thematic module?*

The materials included in the module can be accessed at:

<https://www.highlysensitive.eu/hetool/index.php/advisor/identification>

### *What is in the module?*

You will find here a tool to assess your child for high sensitivity - the Questionnaire of Sensory Processing Sensitivity in Children. The tool has the form of a questionnaire, by means of which the parent/teacher answers questions about selected manifestations of the child's behaviour observed by him/her when working with the child. The tool has been developed in four versions taking into account the age of the child and the audience, i.e. parents and teachers:

- questionnaire for parents of pre-school children (3-6)
- questionnaire for parents of early school children (7-10)
- questionnaire for teachers of pre-school children (3-6)
- questionnaire for teachers of early school age children (7-10)

### *What is the application of the questionnaire - for what purposes should the assessment be conducted?*

The aim of the assessment is not to diagnose difficulties (as is sometimes assumed using the term diagnosis), but above all to find out about the child's strengths, resources, talents and predispositions in order to find out how to develop them and how to support the child's development. The initial identification of a trait allows one to adapt the conditions in which

the child develops to his or her individual needs related to the presence of a certain temperamental trait.

Providing answers to the questionnaire will allow the teacher/parent to recognise whether the child is a highly sensitive child and to what extent high sensitivity manifests itself in different aspects of the child's behaviour:

- physical,
- emotional,
- interpersonal,
- cognitive.

### *The method of conducting the assessment*

The questionnaire is prepared in an electronic version. The teacher/parent provides answers by ticking them directly in the electronic form on the platform. After completing the answers, the parent/teacher receives a description of the results together with a short descriptive note. They do not have to calculate the results themselves.

Reliably and accurately conducted identification of the child's potential provides the basis for designing support - further intervention, centered around (Brzezinska, 2003; Hornowska, Brzezinska, Appelt, Kaliszewska-Czeremska, 2014):

- developing,
- modifying,
- reinforcing strengths,
- minimising,
- reducing the scope of influence,
- eliminating weaknesses,
- using the resources of the environment,



- exploiting the opportunities the social context provides for the child's current functioning and for his/her future development,
- counteracting threats,
- reducing or eliminating their impact.

## EDUCATION AND SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

It is particularly important to properly support highly sensitive children. In an inefficient educational environment, highly sensitive individuals are more likely to experience anxiety and depression. Attention should first be paid to **creating the proper conditions for the child's development**.

In accordance with the humanistic model, upbringing is a process of supporting development aimed at reaching full maturity in the physical, psychological, social and spiritual sphere (Gaś 1999, 2006). Such an educational contact requires the involvement of both the parent and the child. Accordingly, it is the parent and the parent's skills that create the conditions conducive to the child's development..

### **Prevention constitutes correction and compensation of educational activities.**

As far as the child is concerned, prevention is indicated when upbringing fails (cf. Gaś 2006). Zbigniew B. Gaś (2006) lists five leading approaches to prevention.

- ✓ **The cognitive approach** is based on the assumption that if a person learns and understands the facts, then he or she will make a decision on his or her own to stop a particular unconstructive action. The strategy of this approach is therefore to inform.



It is assumed that the knowledge of the parent and other significant persons (e.g. teacher, tutor, school pedagogue, guardian) about the child's temperamental characteristics, as well as the knowledge about constructive educational interventions - creating conditions for development - will foster the development of positive attitudes towards the child.

- ✓ **The affective approach** assumes that sufficiently high and stable self-esteem, problem-solving skills and - with reference to the model - parenting skills help to avoid dysfunctional behaviour.
- ✓ **The cognitive-affective approach**, combines both of the above and assumes that people need both information and life skills. In practice, it combines informational and educational strategies.
- ✓ **The cognitive-behavioural approach** combines views that assume information with views on identifying behaviour that is often the result of learning (social learning theory).
- ✓ **The normative education approach**, which is based on the assumption that people overestimate the prevalence of dysfunctional behaviour, experienced difficulties.

### *The four pillars of working with a highly sensitive child*

In her publication *The Highly Sensitive Child* (2015), E. N. Aron lists four pillars of working with the highly sensitive child. These include preparing parents and teachers to:

- 1) working on the child's adequate self-esteem,
- 2) reducing the shame experienced by the child,
- 3) disciplining in a wise way,
- 4) teaching how to talk about own sensitivity.

## MODULE II: WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT HIGH SENSITIVITY

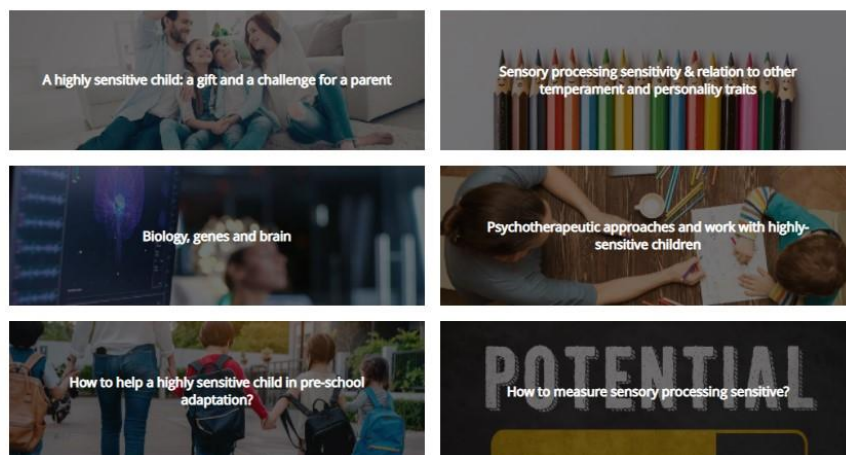
### *Where to find the thematic module?*

The materials contained in the module can be accessed at:

<https://highlysensitive.eu/platforma/co-wiemy-o-wysokiej-wrazliwosci/>



Module 2 (WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT HIGH SENSITIVITY) is a knowledge compendium about high sensitivity. You will find there supporting materials such as articles and presentations. The aim of these materials is to explain the idea of high sensitivity and specifics of the functioning of a highly sensitive child.



## What is in the module?

Here you will find helpful materials - presentations and podcasts. Their aim is to explain the essence of high sensitivity and the specific functioning of a highly sensitive child. Additionally the module contains materials from an international training for staff and a conference on high sensitivity.

### Topics of presentations describing the essence of high sensitivity:

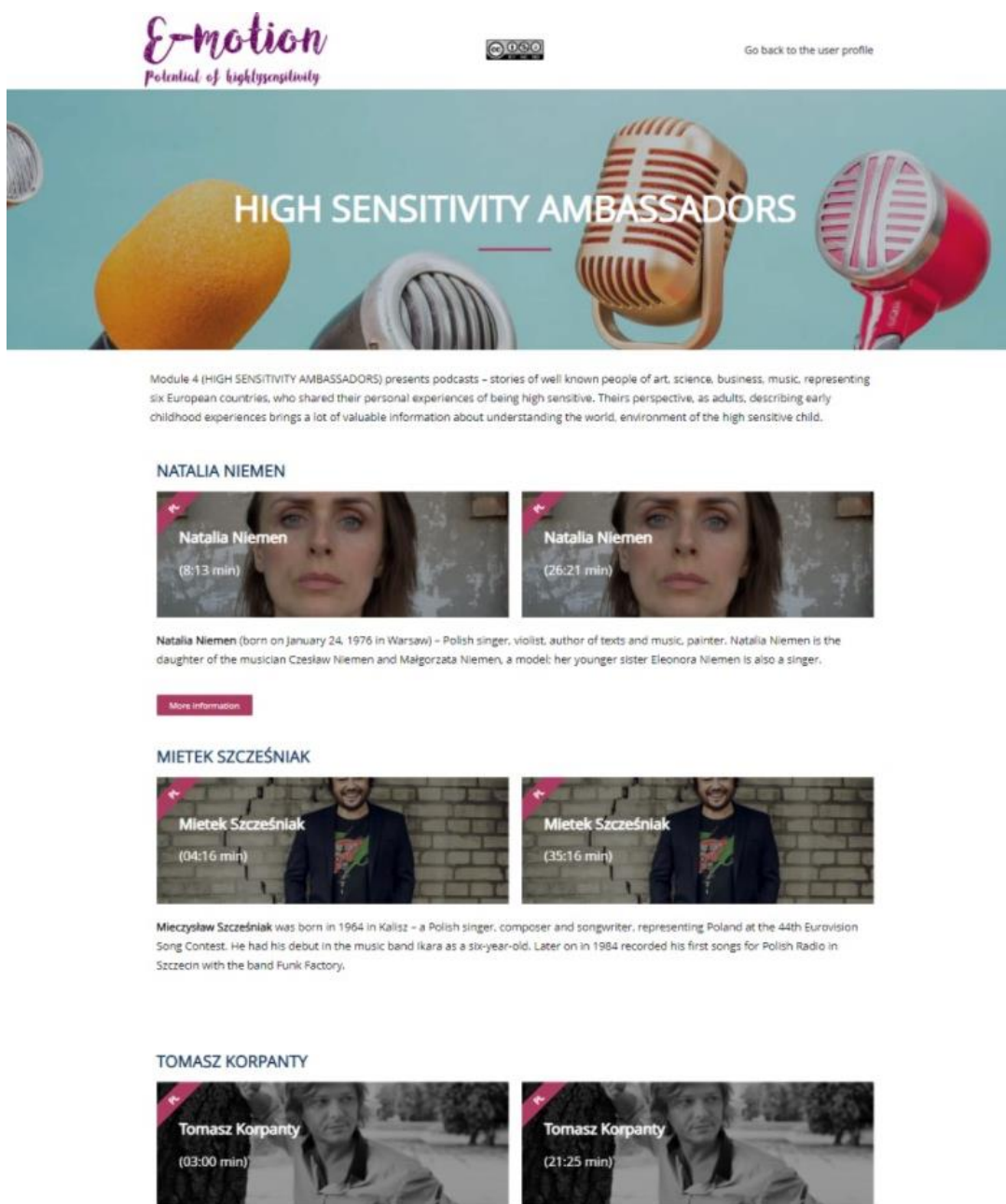
- *The highly sensitive child - a gift and a challenge for the parent*  
The presentation explains the essence of high sensitivity pointing in the direction of parental support for the child.
- *Biology, genes and mind*  
The presentation refers to research on the evolutionary context and the genetic and neuropsychological basis of sensory processing sensitivity.
- *How to help highly sensitive children adapt to kindergarten*  
The presentation points out the main difficulties experienced by highly sensitive children in preschool adaptation. It provides concrete tips for parents and teachers to support the child in this process.
- *Sensitivity of sensory processing and other temperament and personality traits*  
The presentation includes findings from ongoing research focused on finding a relationship between temperament types and selected personality traits and sensory processing sensitivity.
- *Psychotherapeutic approaches and working with highly sensitive children*  
The presentation shows selected methods used in working with highly sensitive children taking into account the assumption that these children do not require special, individual methods of therapeutic work.
- *How to measure sensory processing sensitivity*  
The presentation shows the procedure of creating a tool, referring to theoretical assumptions concerning sensitivity of sensory processing and to tools already existing on the market.

## PODCASTS

### *Where to find the thematic module?*

The materials contained in the module can be accessed at:

<https://highlysensitive.eu/platforma/ambasadorzy-wysokiej-wrazliwosci/>



**NATALIA NIEMEN**

Natalia Niemen (8:13 min)

Natalia Niemen (26:21 min)

Natalia Niemen (born on January 24, 1976 in Warsaw) – Polish singer, violist, author of texts and music, painter. Natalia Niemen is the daughter of the musician Czesław Niemen and Małgorzata Niemen, a model; her younger sister Eleonora Niemen is also a singer.

[More information](#)

**MIETEK SZCZEŚNIAK**

Mitek Szczesniak (04:16 min)

Mitek Szczesniak (35:16 min)

Mieczysław Szczesniak was born in 1964 in Kalisz – a Polish singer, composer and songwriter, representing Poland at the 44th Eurovision Song Contest. He had his debut in the music band Ikara as a six-year-old. Later on in 1984 recorded his first songs for Polish Radio in Szczecin with the band Funk Factory.

**TOMASZ KORPANTY**

Tomasz Korpanty (03:00 min)

Tomasz Korpanty (21:25 min)

### *What is in the module?*

It features stories of 'ambassadors' of high sensitivity - people from the world of art, science, business, talking about their experience of high sensitivity. These are prominent people from Poland, Italy, Spain, North Macedonia and Romania. They speak about their lives and discovering their sensitivity. They share their experience of coping in the world. Their perspective as adults adds much to the understanding of the role of the environment in which a highly sensitive child is raised, and shows the extraordinary potential that highly sensitive people have.

## VIDEO MATERIALS

### *Where to find the thematic module?*

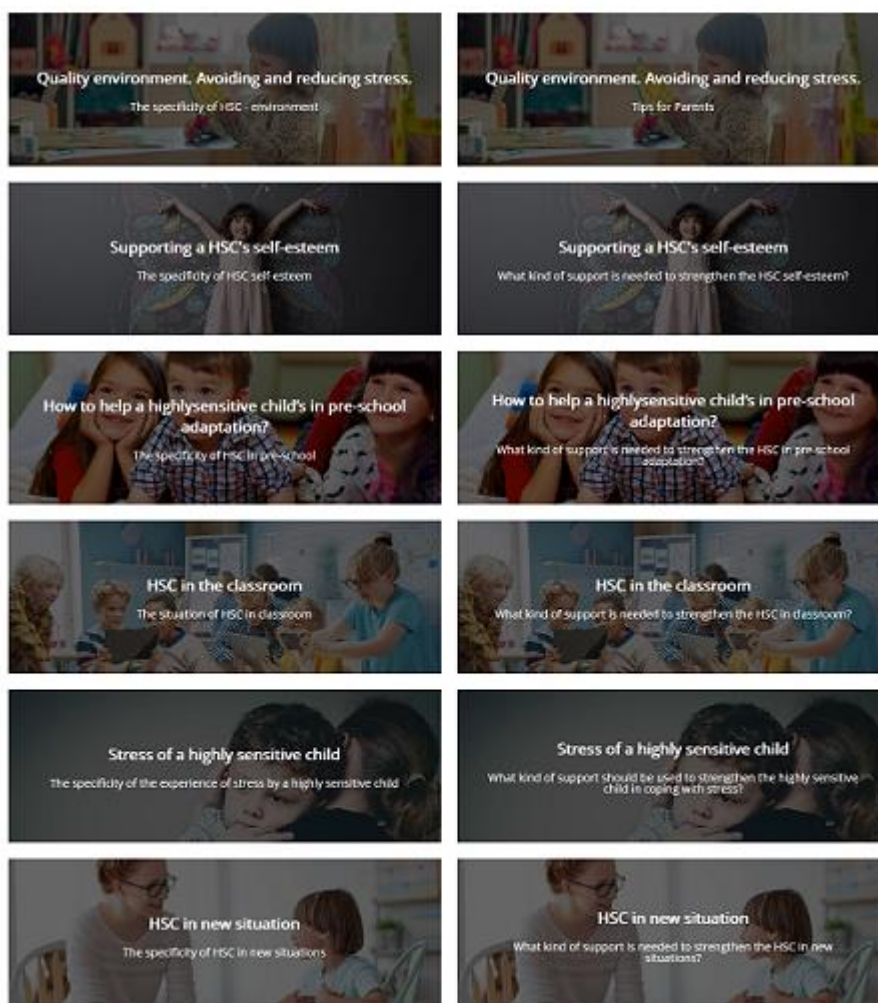
The materials contained in the module can be accessed at:

<https://highlysensitive.eu/platforma/jak-wspierac-wysoko-wrazliwe-dziecko/>





Module 5 (HOW TO SUPPORT A HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILD) consists of short videos, which help to understand the most important dimensions of the functioning of a highly sensitive child and his needs. Videos illustrate substantial tips, which will help parents as well as teachers to support well-being and education of high sensitive children.



### *What is in the module?*

The module includes short videos to help understand the most relevant dimensions of a highly sensitive child's functioning, as well as their needs. The videos are graphically illustrative and provide important guidance for parents and teachers in designing support and education for highly sensitive children. The films are divided into two groups - the first group of films discusses selected characteristics of the highly sensitive child. The second group of films includes suggestions on how to support the child in the identified problems.

### **Topics discussed in the films:**

- 1. Environment quality. Avoiding and reducing stress.*
- 2. Promoting the highly sensitive child's self-esteem*
- 3. How to support the highly sensitive child in kindergarten adaptation.*
- 4. The highly sensitive child in the school classroom.*
- 5. The highly sensitive child's stress.*
- 6. The highly sensitive child in a new situation.*

### *Who can utilise the materials?*

These materials can be of use to teachers and parents:

- As a background reading for personal study in understanding the nature of high sensitivity,
- As an aid of working with parents in supporting highly sensitive children (teachers),
- As an aid of planning work with own child (parents),
- As a supplementary material for planning workshops, educational classes, pedagogical councils and other educational activities.



## EXPERIENCE SHARING FORUM

The approach referred to as *normative education*, is based on the assumption that people overestimate the prevalence of dysfunctional behaviour, experienced difficulties. Given the constructed model, it might be supportive for caregivers of highly sensitive children (especially their parents) to be in contact with other caregivers raising a highly sensitive child/children (Baryła-Matejczuk, Domańska, 2018; Baryła-Matejczuk, 2019). The exchange of parental experiences, sharing successes and difficulties is a source of natural support. Nowadays, direct contact is often replaced by a substitute - online relations, and people learn about social behaviour and the prevalence of certain problems from the media. A solution might be to organise an online space/platform, where parents can obtain reliable knowledge about high sensitivity and share their own experiences. Knowledge and skills to support highly sensitive people is also important for other adults who are important in children's lives (teachers, educators, pedagogues).

### *Where to find the thematic module?*

The materials contained in the module can be accessed at:

<https://highlysensitive.eu/platforma/forum-wymiany/>



#### Is High Sensitivity a disorder?

Is High Sensitivity a disorder? Conversations and consultations about high sensitivity usually start with the question: where does this disorder come from? Thinking about



#### Shy or brave – what is the shyness of highly sensitive children all about?

Shy or brave – what is the shyness of highly sensitive children all about? This question is often asked by parents of highly sensitive



#### Are highly sensitive children self-centered?

Are highly sensitive children self-centered? In conversations with the parents of highly sensitive children, they often manifest the problem of excessive self-focus and demand

## What is in the module?

The module facilitates the exchange of experiences in supporting and educating the highly sensitive child. It is structured in three parts. The first part contains general information about the specific characteristics of the highly sensitive child. The other two parts are intended for teachers and parents. They refer to the specific functioning of the highly sensitive child in school reality and everyday life. The short entries deal with the characteristics of the highly sensitive child and explain in an accessible way where certain behaviours originate from. In this way adults have a chance to understand the child's behaviour and avoid mistakes when working with them. Under each entry there is an opportunity to leave a comment.

## WORKING CONSCIOUSLY WITH HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILDREN

Designing support for highly sensitive children is **not about modifying their traits**. Working consciously does not imply interfering with a trait, accepting it as a difficulty or problem to be dealt with, but **providing conditions in which highly sensitive children have equal opportunities to develop their potential**. The parent and teacher should pay attention to the developmental tasks of pre-school and early school age. After all, we are supporting **"to achieve something"**. The model premises are that we **support to complete developmental tasks appropriate to the child's age** (Baryła-Matejczuk, 2019).

The child, who has to cope with functioning in an open environment outside its home, should learn to modify the patterns of action learned at home and adapt them to the new conditions. The child should change a large part of his/her activity from spontaneous, based on the principle of simple associations and internal impulses to a more reactive one, i.e. in accordance with the physical and social conditions. Adult carers use specific methods and techniques to achieve this. The main developmental processes of this stage concern the child's control of the internal and external conditions of his/her actions, so that he/she can satisfy his/her own needs without creating conflicts with others. The child gradually learns to focus on a broader perspective than himself/herself. This requires an increase in self-control, i.e. directing the expression of emotional states and controlling one's own behaviour (Marszał-Wiśniewska, 2001). Reconciling own desires with social expectations and requirements set by the context is one of the most important tasks of preschool age.

The main tasks of parents and educators are (Matejczuk, 2014):

- ✓ **Accompany the child,**
- ✓ **Support him/her,**
- ✓ **Make demands at the same time,**
- ✓ **Teach the child to cater to his/her own needs,**
- ✓ **Develop a willingness to accept challenges,**

- ✓ **Encourage goal-setting and support efforts to achieve them,**
- ✓ **Foster the ability to understand and respect the needs and rights of others.**

The child's adaptation to changes resulting from tasks entailed in entering kindergarten and school reality depends on how well the child has been prepared for the change by the parents as well as on the sensitivity and efficiency of the preschool and school in responding adequately to the changing needs of the child and supporting him/her in these changes (Brzezińska, 2008; Brzezińska, Rycielska, 2009).

Contemporary approaches to the analysis of a child's readiness for optimal - both from his/her and the institution's point of view - functioning in an educational institution (nursery, kindergarten, school) take into account four interrelated components:

- 1) the readiness of the child in relation to the requirements and style of functioning of the institution,
- 2) the readiness of the institution in relation to the resources of the child and its previous developmental path,
- 3) the family's capabilities and competences in relation to the demands of the change that awaits them in the child's transition to school,
- 4) opportunities for further growth, including expanding the already existing resources created for the child and his/her family in the past and now by the local community and the broader social environment, including the offer of state institutions (Brzezińska, Czub, 2015, p.13).

Recent research into the determinants of dysfunctions and adaptation difficulties in children and young people has focused not so much on risk factors as on protective factors. Confrontation with tasks can thus become an opportunity for the child to adapt and acquire new skills or for dysfunctions and maladaptive behaviour to emerge. To describe these mechanisms, the term resilience has been adopted, derived from the Latin *salire*, which means to spring up and *resilire* to spring back.

In psychological literature resilience is presented in three ways (Ogińska-Bulik, Juczyński, 2011, p. 8):

- 1) As a set of characteristics of an individual,
- 2) The effect of adapting to challenging conditions,
- 3) The process of adaptation itself.

It is worth noting that resilience is sometimes seen as a result of the interaction of forces in the ecosystem: an individual - the environment. It is characterised by considerable dynamism and dependence on the life context, which permits modifications through shaping and developing (Sęk, 2007).

## MODULE VI: RESOURCES FOR WORKING WITH THE CHILD

### *Where to find the thematic module?*

The materials contained in the module can be accessed at:

<https://highlysensitive.eu/platforma/materialy-do-pracy-z-dziecmi/>





Module 6 (MATERIALS FOR WORKING WITH CHILDREN) gives set of working methods supporting high sensitive children. You can find there our proposal of scenarios and exercises easy to use at home as well as in school. Scenarios can be used as material ready to use in the classroom with all children. Moreover these exemplary scenarios can also inspire the preparation of own methods and tools used in daily practice.




1. This is the way I am
2. Taking advantage of difficulties
3. Self-awareness
4. Emotions are required
5. Everyone is different, everyone is important
6. A helping hand
7. A walk through the regulation zones
8. Charging the internal batteries
9. I experience, feel, need
10. Myself in a group
11. Myself in the world
12. The positive brain

 For the children 3-6 years old – Scenarios



1. This is the way I am
2. Taking advantage of difficulties
3. Self-awareness
4. Emotions are required
5. Everyone is different, everyone is important
6. A helping hand
7. A walk through the regulation zones
8. Charging the internal batteries
9. I experience, feel, need
10. Myself in a group
11. Myself in the world
12. The positive brain

 For the children 7-10 years old – Scenarios

## What is in the module?

The module consists of two parts.

Part one is a collection of scenarios, materials for working with highly sensitive children in two age ranges: 3-6 years and 7-10 years. It includes proposals of specific exercises to be

used at home and at school. The scenarios constitute a comprehensive programme planned for 12 meetings arranged thematically:

1. This is the way I am
2. Taking advantage of difficulties
3. Self-awareness
4. Emotions are required
5. Everyone is different, everyone is important
6. A helping hand
7. A walk through the regulation zones
8. Charging the internal batteries
9. I experience, feel, need
10. Myself in a group
11. Myself in the world
12. The positive brain

The scenarios can provide inspiration for creating your own aids and tools to support your work with children. They are ready-made materials to be used in school lessons, when working with all the class (Baryła-Matejczuk, 2019).

Part two is devoted to the biographical method used in the research within the project. The method enabled the collection of biographical data on the life stories of highly sensitive people.

### *Who can utilise these materials?*

The materials can be of use to teachers:

- As a supplementary material for planning lessons with children. The materials can be used both as individual selected topics and as a complete programme of 12 thematic lessons.



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