

## About the Trait of High Sensitivity by Emily Agnew

**About 15 to 20% of the population has the trait called High Sensitivity, which has to do with the way you process information.** This trait was identified by the psychologist Elaine Aron and has since been recognized by the American Psychological Association. It was widely publicized in 1996 in her book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*.

**Many highly sensitive people (HSP for short) are introverts.** Some of them are also shy, but shyness is not part of the trait: shyness is actually a learned stance. In fact, nearly a third of HSP's are extroverts. If you are not sure if you are an HSP, you can take this [quiz](#) to find out.

**Introverts or extroverts, all HSP's share a heightened sensitivity to external stimuli.** Which stimuli, and how sensitive you are, varies greatly from person to person. The list of possibilities includes loud noises, strong smells, bright lights, caffeine and other drugs, violent movies, rough fabrics, crowds, and other people's moods.

**There's another stimulus that's not on that list because it is internal, not external: your own thoughts.** You are gifted with an exceptional mind wired to notice, to process, and to create with depth and detail—and to do it fast.

**Unfortunately, if this express train gets on a negative track, it can take you to a bad part of town very quickly**



**A highly sensitive mind can generate anxiety-producing thoughts just as rapidly as constructive or happy ones.** Combine this with your ability to foresee all kinds of possibilities, a conscientious temperament, and a keen awareness of other's needs and moods—all HSP traits—and you can see why HSP's can easily spiral into anxiety or depression.

**These are times when you wish you could escape from your own head.** And no wonder: when your thoughts are self-critical, your head is not a fun place to be.

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**If you grew up feeling misunderstood or ashamed of your sensitivity, you learned to internalize criticism and shame.** This puts you at a significantly higher risk for anxiety and depression. If you are a sensitive man, you have the added vulnerability of cultural judgment: men are supposed to be tough, not sensitive or emotional.

### **But there's good news...**

**HSP's who grew up being loved and accepted for their sensitivity are actually happier than their non-HSP peers.** Research indicates that HSP's thrive when they are given opportunities to experience new, challenging situations and people in ways that are comfortable and allow them to manage the resulting stimulation.

**What good does this information do you if you had the tougher kind of childhood?** A lot, as it turns out. Happy HSP's are living proof that it is the inner relationship you have with yourself that creates your happiness. And that is something you have lots of control over here and now.

**You may need to start by mourning the support you didn't get as a child,** and the effect that has had on you. But it is great news that you CAN do it: you do not have to keep suffering.

**So the obstacle here is not your HSP mind itself: it's your relationship with your mind.** You've been letting it run the show. Once you learn how to use your mind as a tool, you can develop a better inner relationship to yourself.

**And your highly sensitive body isn't the problem either.** Again, it is your relationship with your body that matters. You need to know what it needs, and to give it that.

### **This is why for you, a flexible, sturdy personal infrastructure is essential**

**Ample sleep, time to de-stimulate when you need to, and consistent ways of grounding in your body in the present moment,** from meditation to exercise, are key for you.

**Your inner relationship is the centerpiece of this infrastructure.** You need to have the skills to manage your amazing mind. This is key, because once you have those, you can access the deep knowing I call your Inner Source.

**This is the really good news: exceptional wisdom, intuition, and foresight are all part of your sensitivity.** Historically, highly sensitive people have held key roles as wise men and wise women, priests, shamans, and royal advisors.

**But to access and claim these gifts in a consistent way, you have to be in a balanced state of mind and health.** Your first act of self-care is to evaluate your own infrastructure, in the light of your new understanding of stimulation and sensitivity. How is your sleep? Your eating? Your exercise routine, if you have one? Your schedule? Your personal support system? Your spiritual connection?

**If your infrastructure is sturdy and flexible, congratulations!** If you've identified significant gaps or even glaring holes, don't despair. This truly is good news, because even small steps towards addressing these issues will release an amount of energy that will surprise you.

*Luminos Listening programs are designed to help you build a rich inner relationship, a sturdy, flexible personal infrastructure, and a strong connection to your Inner Source—all key elements of a happy life for a highly sensitive person. You can read more at [www.luminoslistening.com/services](http://www.luminoslistening.com/services).*

All credit to Elaine Aron for information on high sensitivity (see *The Highly Sensitive Person* by Elaine Aron, Broadway Books, 1997)