

INTERNATIONAL BESTSELLER!

“Engaging, perceptive...suggests new paths for making sensitivity a blessing, not a handicap. A must-read.”

—Philip G. Zimbardo, author of *Shyness*

The Highly Sensitive Person

*How to Thrive When the
World Overwhelms You*

ELAINE N. ARON, Ph.D.

Updated with a New Author's Note

What readers are saying about Elaine Aron and *The Highly Sensitive Person*

...

“I have just finished *The Highly Sensitive Person* and I can’t thank you enough for writing such a wonderful book—you put into clear, understandable words what I have always known about myself. As I read your book, I felt for the first time in my life that someone truly understood what it was like to go through life as a highly sensitive individual.... Your book was the first that I have ever read that not only validated the traits of highly sensitive individuals but cast them as necessary for our society.”—M. C., Rockaway, NJ

“First, let me express my deep gratitude to you if I can. I have just finished reading your book.... You have truly given me hope for a new life at the age of 52. I hardly know how to express the comfort and joy I have received from you.... Once again, thank you, thank you, thank you!”—J. M., New York, NY

“I cannot thank you enough for the inner peace your book has given me!”—S. P., Sacramento, CA

“This book has opened my eyes to the fact that I am not alone in my sensitivity *and* that it is OK to be this way.... I’ve always felt that there was something wrong with me. . . . It has given me tremendous insight.... So thank you for your research and your words of encouragement. They’ve both been a blessing.”—M. G., Belle River, Ontario (Canada)

“I am writing to express my gratitude to Elaine Aron for her book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*. I laughed and cried, I felt known. I felt affirmed. It is not only ‘OK’ to be highly sensitive, it is a gift. Thank you.”—L. H., Findlay, OH

“Thank you for writing such a wonderful book.”—R. P., Norwalk, CA

“. . . it really helped me understand myself a lot better.”—E. S., Westerville, OH

“I can’t remember the last time I sat down and read a book from cover to cover in one day. It has really made me feel like a part of a larger group, and not quite so weird after all. . . . I am looking forward to reading this book again.”—K. J., San Francisco, CA

“I loved the book!”—S. R., Springfield, MA

“I just finished reading Elaine N. Aron’s excellent book... The descriptions fit me perfectly! It was inspiring, informative, and emotional.”—R. D., San Francisco, CA

“I find Dr. Aron’s book immensely valuable.”—L. J. W., Provo, UT

“I have been trying to find out who I am and what I can do. Many of the situations described in the book I find fit my situation. . . . I wish I could send [it to] everyone I know and have known.”—C. M., Riverside, CA

“I just read your book and it is *extraordinary!* Absolutely the best and most helpful of many I’ve read. . . . You have done tremendous work and I am so deeply touched by much of what you say.”—S. S., New York, NY

“This book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*, was a revelation to me.” —A. A., Tustin, CA

“Your book ... has helped me so much.”—A. B., Lethbridge, Alberta (Canada)

“*The Highly Sensitive Person* was a true revelation to me and to several others I recommended the book to.”—D. R., Irvine, CA

“Elaine Aron’s book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*, is the first ever to really speak to *me!*”—M. J., Houston, TX

“I have enjoyed reading your book, *The Highly Sensitive Person*, and find the information and insights extremely valuable.”—M. F., Mountain View, CA

The Highly Sensitive Person

How to Thrive When the World Overwhelms You

REVISED EDITION

Elaine N. Aron



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*To Irene Bernadicou Pettit, Ph.D.—being both poet and peasant, she knew how
to plant this seed and tend it until it blossomed.*

To Art, who especially loves the flowers—one more love we share.

Acknowledgments

I especially want to acknowledge all the highly sensitive people I interviewed. You were the first to come forward and talk about what you had known very privately about yourself for a long time, changing yourselves from isolated individuals to a group to be respected. My thanks also to those who have come to my courses or seen me for a consultation or in psychotherapy. Every word of this book reflects what you all have taught me.

My many student research assistants—too many to name—also earn a big thanks, as do Barbara Kouts, my agent, and Bruce Shostak, my editor at Carol, for their effort to see that this book reached all of you. Barbara found a publisher with vision; Bruce brought the manuscript into good shape, reining me in at all the right places but otherwise letting me run with it as I saw it.

It's harder to find words for my husband, Art. But here are some: Friend, colleague, supporter, beloved—thanks, with all my love.

I believe in aristocracy, though—if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power ... but ... of the sensitive, the considerate. . . . Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. Thousands of them perish in obscurity, a few are great names. They are sensitive for others as well as themselves, they are considerate without being fussy, their pluck is not swankiness but the power to endure ...

—E. M. Forster, “What I Believe,”
in *Two Cheers for Democracy*

Table of Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Author's Note, 2012](#)

[Preface](#)

[Are You Highly Sensitive? - A SELF-TEST](#)

[1 - The Facts About Being Highly Sensitive](#)

[2 - Digging Deeper](#)

[3 - General Health and Lifestyle for HSPs](#)

[4 - Reframing Your Childhood and Adolescence](#)

[5 - Social Relationships](#)

[6 - Thriving at Work](#)

[7 - Close Relationships](#)

[8 - Healing the Deeper Wounds](#)

[9 - Medics, Medications, and HSPs](#)

[10 - Soul and Spirit](#)

[Tips for Health-Care Professionals Working With Highly Sensitive People](#)

[Tips for Teachers Working With Highly Sensitive Students](#)

[Tips for Employers of Highly Sensitive People](#)

[*Notes*](#)

[*About the Author*](#)

[*Copyright Page*](#)

Author's Note, 2012

In 1998, three years after this book was first published, I wrote a new preface for it titled “A Celebration.” It was an invitation for all of us to feel good about how many people had discovered they were highly sensitive and found the book useful, and that the idea was catching on in the scientific world. Now we can celebrate about fifty times more of the same. *The Highly Sensitive Person* has been translated into fourteen languages, from Swedish, Spanish, and Korean to Hebrew, French, and Hungarian. There have been articles about high sensitivity in many prominent media throughout the world. In the U.S., that has included a feature in *Psychology Today*, a shorter discussion in *Time*, and many women’s and health magazines such as *O Magazine* as well as numerous health websites. There are “HSP Gatherings” and courses on the subject in the United States and Europe, plus YouTube videos, books, magazines, newsletters, and websites and all sorts of services exclusively highly sensitive persons—most good and some, well, not as good. Tens of thousands subscribe to my own newsletter, *Comfort Zone*, at hsperson.com, where there are now hundreds of newsletter articles archived covering every aspect of being highly sensitive. We have come a long way

Three Revisions, Right Here

Given that this book was written at the very beginning of a minor revolution, I have thought I should revise it. But when I look it over, there’s not much I would change. It does the job well, with three exceptions. First, and most important, I wanted to add the expanded scientific research. That’s vital because it helps us all to trust that this trait is real, that what is in this book is real. This preface will update you on the research.

Second, there is now a simple, comprehensive description of the trait, “DOES,” that expresses its facets nicely. *D* is for depth of processing. Our fundamental characteristic is that we observe and reflect before we act. We process everything more, whether we are conscious of it or not. *O* is for being easily overstimulated, because if you are going to pay more attention to everything, you are bound to tire sooner. *E* is for giving emphasis to our