

Understanding Emotional sensitivity of Children

Temperament Matters

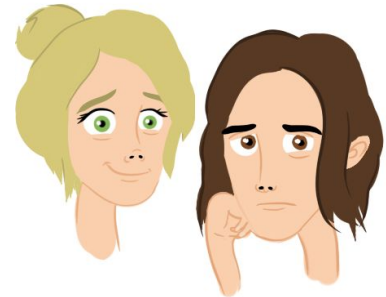


Do you have children whose reactions seem to be excessive: for example, when they see something sad, they cry for hours afterwards? Do they get upset over what appears to be the smallest of things and sometimes nothing at all?

Or, do you have children who seem to rarely get upset or express how they are feeling?

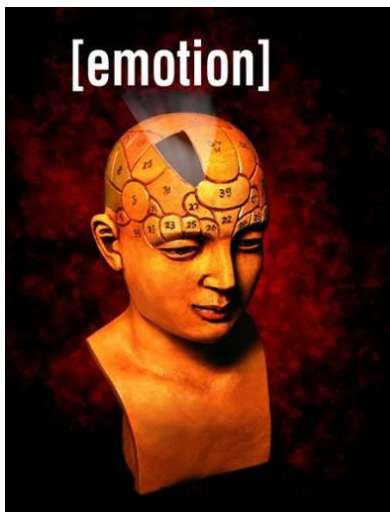
The degree to which your children are emotionally sensitive is an innate part of their temperament. **An individual's temperament**

consists of ten traits, and is what makes all children unique in how they respond to the world around them. Understanding your children's temperament can help you to parent them in the most effective way possible.



What is Emotional Sensitivity?

Emotional sensitivity refers to **the ease or difficulty with which your children respond emotionally to various situations.** This trait is measured on two scales.



- The first scale measures **how tuned in your children are to their own feelings.** Some children are highly sensitive emotionally to their own feelings and feel things very deeply, while others do not seem to be aware of what they are feeling at all.
- The second scale measures **how sensitive your children are to others' feelings and emotions.** Some children are very tuned in to what is going on for others and other children appear to be non-responsive to what they see emotionally around them.

It is important to note that some children can be high on one scale of emotional sensitivity and low on the other. They may be very aware of their own feelings, even to the point of being self-absorbed, while not aware of other people's feelings, and vice versa.

Emotional sensitivity to self

Then this means that your children have a tendency to **display emotions** such as hurt, sorrow, worry, embarrassment, fear, empathy or anger **more straightforwardly, even more dramatically, than those who are less emotionally sensitive.**

- The goal is not to dismiss their feelings; instead, teach them how to express their strong reactions in socially appropriate ways.
- These children will often share with you how they feel about every little thing.
- They may feel and express any injustices very strongly, such as those related to their siblings and “fair” treatment. Do not take their intense emotions so personally.
- They tend to hold on to feelings much longer than others, which can be very trying for parents. Teach them how to forgive and forget, so they can learn to move on and not dwell on feelings.
- Highly emotionally sensitive children can become overwhelmed when they encounter scenes depicting emotionally charged topics. Parents may need to monitor their children’s viewing of media or events that are too frightening or sad.
- The positive side of having children who are more emotionally sensitive, especially towards others, is that they often tend to be much more considerate and empathic.
- As adults they often do well in careers in the helping professions, and they can be very sensitive writers.



Emotional Sensitivity towards others:

These children **rarely become upset even under adverse circumstances and tend not to make a “big deal” about things.**

They often do not notice and are unaware of how others are feeling and sometimes they even might be considered insensitive or self-centered.

- These children need to learn to identify what others are feeling and often they need assistance in understanding their own emotions. Parents can help by naming these emotions for their children, by talking about feelings and by encouraging the expression of their children’s feelings.



- Everyday events, like watching the news or a movie, reading a book together, or shopping, can be great opportunities to share your feelings and emotions, and help your children identify and talk about their feelings and reactions.



Things Parents Can Do

- Understand that emotional sensitivity is **a part of your children's in-born temperament**.
- **Avoid negatively labeling your children** who may be more emotionally sensitive as a "whiner" or "cry-baby" or "selfish." Instead, use descriptive, more positive words like "more sensitive," "tenderhearted," "intense" and "aware of their own feelings."
- **Acknowledge your children's temperament** and help them to understand their own temperament.
- Learn to **appreciate your children's unique way of being** so you can understand their intense reactions and behaviors and avoid shaming or embarrassing them for being who they are.
- **Teach children the words to use** to express more accurately and appropriately how they are feeling.
- Learn to **work together**. Understand how your temperament fits or does not fit with your children's temperament and create strategies to help each other.
- **Send messages to your children that help them to appreciate their unique being** and help them to feel good about who they are.

"You have very strong feelings."

"You express yourself strongly."

"You care a lot about other people."

"You are very aware of how other people are feeling about things."

"You know what you are feeling and like to tell me about it."

"You can feel what you are feeling and then move on."

"You can learn to understand other people's feelings and perspectives."

