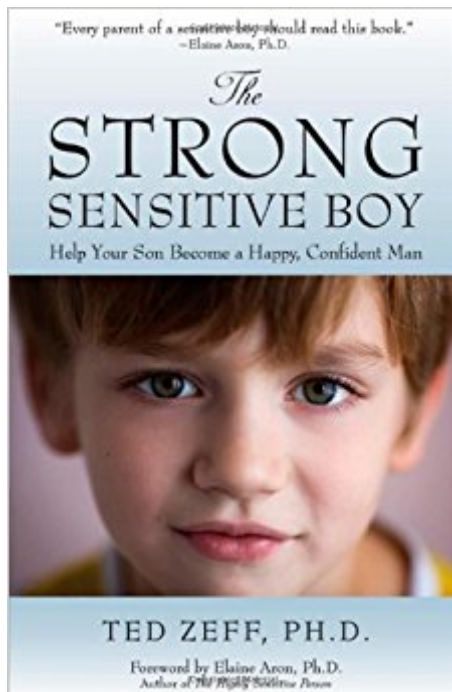


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The Strong, Sensitive Boy



Synopsis

Does your son tend to be disturbed by loud noises, violence, and crowds, fearful of new situations, easily hurt by criticism, or hesitant about playing aggressive games? Your son may be one of the 20 percent of all boys with a finely tuned nervous system. Our sensitive boys tend to be creative, kind, and gentle, appreciating beauty and feeling love deeply. Therefore, it's particularly challenging for sensitive boys to grow up in a culture where boys are taught to act tough, aggressive, and unemotional. In this groundbreaking book, psychologist Ted Zeff explores the unique challenges of sensitive boys, showing parents, educators, and mentors how to help sensitive boys grow into strong, happy, and confident men. Dr. Zeff offers practical advice on how to help your son increase his self-esteem and thrive in the family, at school, with friends, and in sports. From the Publisher: This book is also important for sensitive men to read to help them heal their childhood wounds, learn how to navigate through our aggressive, overstimulating world, and accept themselves as sensitive men. This book is helpful for sensitive women since how society treats sensitive men deeply affects highly sensitive women--and all women close to sensitive males.

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Customer Reviews

"Every parent of a sensitive boy should read this book."-Elaine N. Aron, Ph.D. author of The Highly Sensitive Person and The Highly Sensitive Child "The Strong, Sensitive Boy offers practical advice and innovative solutions for parents, teachers, and anyone working with sensitive boys. I highly recommend it."-Michael Gurian, author of The Wonder of Boys & The Minds of Boys "An insightful, important look at the role sensitivity has in true masculine power. A wonderful guide for parents, sons, and educators!"-Judith Orloff, M.D. author of Second Sight

I purchased this book after reading *The Highly Sensitive Person (HSP)* by Elaine Aron. My feedback will be different from many other reviewers as I have a highly sensitive son, but I am an HSP myself, so are my father and my paternal grandmother. There seems to be strongly hereditary character in our family, even if only one child is HSP at each generation. One of the first things that surprised me in the book is that the examples of HSP's chosen are overwhelmingly of isolated cases within their family. There isn't any story about an HSP family. All four of us also happen to be exceptionally gifted, and in my case an Aspie too. I am a northern European, not an American. The author likes to repeat Elaine Aron's impression that HSP's have a harder time in North American culture than in Europe or Asia, but that is not true. I did suffer a lot from bullying in elementary school (less after puberty) because of my high sensitivity. I noticed early on that there was often - though not always - a correlation between higher intelligence and higher sensitivity. It was also the case in my family. All the high IQ individuals were HSP's, and the others were neither. In my case it was my mother who never understood my heightened sensitivity. I disagreed a lot with the author in the first chapters of the book and generally disagree with his approach. Although I recognize my childhood in many of his descriptions, I find his recommendations to be impractical (how many parents can afford homeschooling?) or ineffective (see below about bullies), either because I have tried them or because I know they cannot be implemented in many cases. I will share my remarks chapter by chapter. In the first chapter, Ted Zeff describes the main traits of character associated with being an HSB (highly sensitive boy), such as conscientiousness, caution, shyness, feeling things more strongly, heightened sensitivity to bright lights, noise, smells, pain and time pressure, lower impulsivity, tendency to anxiety. I do have all of these. But he fails to mention the link with higher intelligence and with Asperger's syndrome, even though I found out in online communities that the vast majority of Aspies are HSBs too, and indeed higher sensitivity to external stimuli, introversion and conscientiousness are all defining traits of Asperger's syndrome. I searched the e-book and there isn't a single mention of Asperger's. Why this omission? He does mention that some HSB's are gifted, but he only seems to think that that applies for the arts and spirituality. He says that HSB's are more compassionate, gentle and creative, are natural peacemakers and have the ability to feel love deeply and appreciate deep spiritual experiences. Although it may be true to some extent, I feel that it applies more to highly sensitive women than men, because these are typical right brain qualities, and men, even highly sensitive ones, are much more often left-brained. In the case of Aspies like me, we are very strongly left-brained, very intellectual, rational and analytical, and not particularly spiritual or compassionate. On page 18, Ted Zeff writes "Your son is in good

company sharing these traits with such famous highly sensitive males as Abraham Lincoln; the great psychologist Carl Jung; and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart". He doesn't seem to realize that all three of them were also probable Aspies (just Google 'famous Aspies'). Ted Zeff provides many examples of HSB's who abhor violence, even on TV, and prefer artistic or spiritual activities that may make look more "gay" or overly feminine in the eyes of others. He even spends a whole sub-chapter trying to "dispel the myth" that sensitive males are gay. But why bother? HSB's in my family are so different from gays that I don't see how the two could be likened to one another. In addition to being rational and analytical, we like cars and war movies (even though we are against real war), but hate shopping and crowded parties. We much prefer to discuss facts and statistics than emotions or relationship problems. Although my son and I had an artistic penchant as kids, we both loved playing with little soldiers and toy weapons or watch relatively violent TV programs (except horror movies, which would give us nightmares for months as children). We just hate fighting for real because of our higher physical sensitivity. Likewise, we dislike heated arguments because we easily get emotionally overwhelmed, but love to debate ideas in a rational and civilized manner. Our favorite topics of discussion would be about science and technology. It's not that we dislike conflict, but we are more sensitive to it and therefore need to contain it within acceptable boundaries. In contrast many of the highly sensitive women I know dislike all kinds of conflicts, even logical arguments. I am quite shocked that the author chooses people like Jesus or Gandhi as 'typical' examples of highly sensitive men, just because they were against violence and conflicts. But what about all the other HSP's, including countless prominent scientists and artists? Beethoven was surely an HSP, but that did not prevent him from composing relatively violent and war-like symphonies. The best examples of highly sensitive men would be the recluse, reflective and meticulous scientist (Newton, Einstein), inventor (Edison, Tesla), classical composer (Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler) or painter (Michelangelo, Van Gogh), who are the complete opposite of the stereotypical flamboyant, effusive, party-loving homosexual man. There couldn't be more different kinds of people. The author also suggests that low testosterone may be the cause of higher sensitivity in men. That doesn't make any sense since prepubescent boys all have low testosterone. What's more, the ratio of HSP's is the same in both genders. Testosterone may increase aggressivity and lower sensitivity to pain (in my experience), but not to loud noises, strong smells, or general intellectual sensitivity. High testosterone during the brain development in utero is thought to make individuals more left-brained, rational, logical and analytical - in other word a more masculine mind - but does not lessen intellectual sensitivity. On the contrary, great thinkers are usually more sensitive, not less. When I read Elaine Aron's book, I wasn't bothered so much by her description of

highly sensitive women being more artistic or spiritual. After all it was women and the author was a woman too. But this book is about boys and is written by a man. It just seems like Ted Zeff is repeating everything his mentor, Elaine Aron, taught him, but that he doesn't have any new ideas of his own, and doesn't really understand the difference between highly sensitive boys and girls. There may be boys who are more right-brained, artistic and spiritual, and others who have a feminine brain, with some overlap between the two, but they are a minority. Looking at adults, I notice that the majority of HSPs among men are scientific rather than spiritual, and cerebral rather than sentimental. I am also surprised that he recommends several times Elaine Aron's books in various chapters of the book, instead of adding the recommendations at the end in a Further Reading section. It makes it look like he is overly dependent on Elaine Aron's work. Chapter 4 deals with problems at school, such as teachers hurting the child's self-esteem by shaming him in front of the class, and of course bullying from other kids. I experienced all this and this is why I can say with confidence that Ted Zeff's advice is unlikely to work. Parents talking to a particularly insensitive teacher about their son's high sensitivity could actually make things worse. This is my personal experience and exactly what he relates on page 58 when the sadistic teacher explained in front of the whole class that the boy's mother said he peed his pants because other kids made fun of him. Of course it only made the situation worse. My grades in school depended almost solely on the quality of my relationship with the teacher and how accepting he or she was of my sensitivity. Unfortunately it is not something one can change. It's a matter of natural compatibility between individuals. In elementary school, where there is only one main teacher, it could be envisaged to change class if it doesn't work out with that teacher. It would be much more difficult in middle and high school though, where each subject is taught by a different teacher. Ted Zeff echoed Elaine Aron's belief that highly sensitive children have a much easier time in European and Asian countries than in North America, and that bullying is less common and less extreme too. But the examples of what constitutes bullying in North America pale in comparison to what I experienced in Europe. Being very physically sensitive, I didn't like playing football (soccer) and, after being hit a few times with the ball in the belly or head in first grade, I instinctively protected myself with my arms every time the ball flew in my directions. Of course other kids made fun of me, but the bullying part was not the jeering and the mocking. They would corner me against a wall and shoot as hard as they could with the ball at me to see how well I could protect myself, until I had bruises all over my arms and legs. Sometimes they would use a hard basketball, which is even more painful. They were typically four or five against me and they always chose a time when no adult was around so that nobody would stop them if I shouted for help. Other common forms of bullying were forcing the

targeted kid to eat insects, worms or earth, or trying to stick the kid's head in the toilet. That kind of bullying happened on a daily basis to all the sensitive kids in my elementary school. I am appalled and a bit amused too when I read Ted's advice to tell the bullies things like "If you can't talk to me in a respectful way, I don't want you to talk to me. I am giving you fair warning: back off now". That may work with girls, but my bullies would have laughed at me if I talked to them like that and would have bullied me even more. Telling an adult just didn't work. My parents could also tell the teachers, who in turn asked me to call them when I was being bullied. But the thing is that bullies always find a time and place when no teacher is around, and if a teacher does come, they immediately stop and act as if nothing happened, or even pretend to be friend with the bullied kid - until the teacher is out of sight again... From middle school, perhaps thanks to puberty and my rising levels of testosterone, I managed to fight back bullies. I learned karate and that did help, as long as one finds the courage to act. The fear of retaliation is usually the strongest deterrent to fighting back, but once you have reached a point when your everyday life couldn't get any more miserable, there is no alternative but to fight back. It's easier when one isn't outnumbered, which is why it is a good idea to stick with small groups of friends at all times. Bullies like to target isolated kids rather than groups. I am sorry to say that fighting back is the only thing that worked. Bullies quickly stopped targeting me after that, especially since I was taller than them and did hurt some of them pretty badly when I got angry. When I was smaller I was just too kind and sensitive to hit back and was afraid I would be the one being punished if I injured them while defending myself. That's the plight of the highly sensitive boy. I think the most important for HSBs is to find a school where your son can be placed in the care of teachers who can deal tactfully with sensitive children (with the possibility to change class if it doesn't work out). The school should also have a zero tolerance policy toward bullying and attentive, constant monitoring of the playground (which my school didn't have).

Chapter 5 (Making and Keeping Friends) and 6 (Boys and Sports) are the only chapters with which I found myself agreeing with almost everything. HSBs prefer to play alone or with only one friend (another HSB if possible). They are easily overwhelmed emotionally in groups and cannot easily shrug off insults that other boys like to exchange as a form of male bonding. Most HSBs don't like competitive sports, especially tough ones like football, nor do they care much about discussing sports. They'd much rather read, play by themselves, or go for walks in nature. What is certain is that parents should never push an HSB to play with neighborhood kids if he doesn't want to, and should never blame or shame him for playing alone. I don't understand why HSBs would want to emulate non-HSBs' tougher behaviors and daring games. It's far more desirable in the long-term to be a sensitive bookworm with many intellectual interests who prefers learning to hanging out with the

guys talking about sports. I have noticed that sensitive men are often the ones who end up with advanced degrees from famous universities and who get the best jobs later. When I look back and see what my childhood friends (or bullies) became thanks to the Internet, in most cases the insensitive bullies ended up with low paid manual jobs or unemployed, while my closest HSB friends got Masters or PhDs. I like to say that it's payback time. For a few years as a child I tried to fit by playing basketball and other team sports. Although I was tall, fairly athletic and had excellent spatio-visual skills, I just didn't enjoy it that much. I only liked tennis. But coming from a culture where winning is the only thing that matters (America doesn't have a monopoly on that), the pressure during matches was just unbearable and I couldn't play half as well as during training. Even though I was one of the best players during training, I would perform the worst in competition because I was too nervous and would lose my abilities. That's when I realized that it was far more enjoyable for me to play just for fun and to maintain my fitness and stamina. I have always known that I was much more sensitive than other boys my age. By age 15 I understood that competition was only good for less sensitive people who didn't feel the pressure. It wasn't truly about skills, but just about insensitivity. Since I had already linked sensitivity with intelligence and success in professional life, I increasingly started to wonder why anyone would want to compete for the distinction of being seen as tough, insensitive moron. That's not what it means to be a real man. Perhaps for those who haven't evolved since Cro-Magnon, but for the rest of us who live in the digital age and a globalized society, it is far more important to be highly creative or to know about science, technologies, business strategies, geopolitics and foreign languages than to know how to throw a ball. Those who are stuck in that stage of admiring the Paleolithic hunter's athletic prowess are the real misfits in today's world, even if they are the boisterous majority. What I appreciated in Elaine Aron's books is that she constantly reminds the reader that highly sensitive individuals are best suited for the traditional Indo-European priestly or royal advisor class, while non-sensitive people would fit better in the warrior, farmer or merchant classes. In Hinduism, the only surviving ancient Indo-European religion, the Brahmin caste includes priests, intellectuals, teachers and advisors, and is the highest caste in the caste system, above the Maharajas (who belong to the warrior caste). Ted Zeff explains that sensitive boys are generally well accepted in India, but that makes sense considering that the highest, most revered and privileged caste are the sensitive (intellectual or spiritual) Brahmins. The same acceptance toward HSP's is found in Buddhist Thailand. This isn't surprising either since Buddhism is derived from Hinduism (the Buddha was born a Brahmin) and emphasizes sensitive qualities like peace, harmony and introspection, which come easier in HSP's than in non-sensitive and aggressive people. Countries like Japan value both

its traditional warrior class (samurai) and its priestly/intellectual class (e.g. Buddhist monks) and could serve as an example for Western societies. In Christian Europe, since the Middle Ages, the priestly class was eliminated as priests were prohibited to marry and have children. As a result, priests typically came from the nobility (warrior class), so it's perhaps not surprising that what was originally a peaceful religion became a conquering religion, with Jesuit missionaries trained like soldiers, violent conversions and persecutions of heretics, and wars of religion between Christian branches. That's what happens when non-sensitive warriors take over religion. HSP's have only been experiencing a come back in the last 20 or 30 years thanks to the rising influence of sciences and technologies (the intellectual class), and geeks setting up the new trends instead of more insensitive warrior-like men. A real man is not someone who represses his emotions and shows that he is tough and insensitive. Those would be desirable qualities for the old warrior class only. Warriors also like social conformity. That's why peer pressure is so important for non-sensitive boys. Unfortunately that also makes such people less able to think for themselves. Independent free thinkers are typically sensitive people, who analyze the information they receive, reflect on it, and judge by themselves whether it is correct or not. This is why HSP's make the best judges, advisors and scientists. They don't follow the herd, but think by themselves. It can be hard socially and emotionally to go against everybody else when you know that the others are wrong. It's hard to be Martin Luther or Galileo and tell the all powerful Catholic Church that they are wrong. But the world needs free thinkers like this to advance. These are the real men. There is no social, spiritual or scientific progress possible without courageous, independent-minded HSP's. For thousands of years since the Bronze Age, Europeans placed a higher value on their equivalents of the Brahmin class. The Dark Ages changed that, but it's time to understand once again the true value of sensitive individuals. In Chapter 10, Ted Zeff answers questions from parents of sensitive boys. However he merely repeats what he said in earlier chapters, often just copying and pasting whole sentences or paragraphs. I suppose that he first received those questions and answered them before writing the book. Otherwise I would feel like he wrote the questions himself to match his advice from previous chapters. In either case it feels like a useless chapter added to give more pages to the book. Chapter 11, the last chapter, is a collection of advice from the thirty sensitive men that Ted interviewed. There are only 11 pieces of advice, so most of them don't seem to have contributed. Ted also mentions several times through the book that these thirty men or boys came from five countries, as if he wanted to confer an international character to his research. However, apart from Americans, he only mentions four non-Americans, including one Canadian. As a European who has travelled extensively around the world, I find it mildly amusing that he should think of three people

outside North America as a representative sample of world cultures. There is so much cultural diversity just within Europe that I can't believe he would even consider making generalizations over northern Europe based on the experience of a single Danish guy. I am also convinced that the trait of high sensitivity is not evenly distributed across countries and regions. I have studied enough cultural differences between European countries to know that some cultures display more sensitive traits than others. The Finns, for example, are generally regarded as shy, taciturn, introverted, cautious and conscientious - all HSP traits. Mediterranean cultures, and South Italian one in particular, like to emphasize more extroverted macho traits, and seem to thrive in a brightly lit, boisterous and chaotic environment - everything HSPs cannot stand. The natural environment and local history certainly played a role in selecting more or less genes for high sensitivity in each region. Hot countries naturally have stronger sunlight than those close to the Arctic circle. Odors are exacerbated by heat. Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries adopted agriculture earlier and had higher historical population densities than northern Europe. More crowded environments led to the development of more violent, more disease-ridden and less sensitive societies and cultures, and consequently also to the survival of a higher proportion of less sensitive people who could thrive in such environments. In contrast, Scandinavia and Finland were very thinly populated until a few centuries ago, and still are places where nature and the great outdoors play an important part in people's lives. It's normal that people with Nordic ancestry should have genes that predispose them to enjoy nature, quiet, dim sunlight and fresh air rather than overcrowded and noisy cities. Ted Zeff just keeps citing again and again throughout the book that highly sensitive people make up 20% of the population. The truth is that he doesn't have a clue because no proper study has ever been done in any country. The 20% is based on a casual telephone survey of only 300 American individuals (one millionth of the country's population) by Elaine Aron. Furthermore, this survey was not even based on a scientific questionnaire, but on people's self assessment of their own sensitivity. Keep in mind that these people hadn't read any book on the subject and didn't have any clear guideline as to how they should compare their sensitivity to the general population. This was purely subjective. I did the experiment with family members and friends, first asking them to rate their own sensitivity from 1 to 5. After that I gave them the questionnaire from Elaine Aron's book, but added a scale from 1 to 5 for each entry. It turns out that most people can't properly assess their sensitivity. As I knew intimately all the participants, I could also compare their sensitivity to mine in terms of intensity. My mother would say that she didn't like noisy places, but actually enjoys crowded parties, while I can't stand to talk to someone even with background music! That's a completely different level of sensitivity. In conclusion I find this book to be highly unscientific, rather poorly

researched, and although the subject is one very dear to me and deserves the attention of all parents who have a highly sensitive boy, they won't find very useful advice in this book. The only merit of this book is that it will make parents aware that some children, boys or girls, are more sensitive than others and therefore should be treated differently based on their natural sensitivity. Non-sensitive parents should certainly not push their HSB's to do activities they aren't comfortable doing, and should accept their children for who they are. To prevent bullying at school, which in my opinion is one of the most important issues that a HSB could face in his life, it is vital that the father, or another male tutor, teaches the HSB to stand up for himself or to find strategies to avoid bullies (like staying with a group of friends or even staying in class instead of going to an unsafe playground). I also agree that any HSB should learn self-defense, aikido and karate probably being the best (I found judo to be almost useless against taller and heavier bullies).

A little repetitive, but the author integrates how the sensitive boy deals with all aspects of society. I've been too hard on my sensitive boy and it doesn't help that I have a type A daughter just like her type A dad. Mostly worked on me to change my expectations of what's normal for my son who is sensitive, but a very bright kid. I'm a type A, so I've come to realize what works for me doesn't work for him and that's OK.

Let me start by saying that I, myself, am a 19 year old boy who knew there was "something wrong" with me for as long as I can remember. I have always been artistically inclined and deeply moved by emotions I always kept hidden. My parents weren't the most supportive and I really didn't "bond" with neither one of them. I decided to move out of the toxic environment that is my house and through some self-realization and self-healing I decided to order the book "The Strong, Sensitive Boy." I actually found it while browsing for other books and it caught my attention. Since I knew that I have always been a sensitive boy, I figured why not? This book has changed my life. I think this is perhaps the only book that truly helped me find myself. After reading it, I realized that I have been lying to myself all these years pretending to be something I am not. Now, as a 19 year old college student, after so many years, I have finally found myself. This book is a great healing book for those sensitive boys whose wounds were invisible to everyone else. I have never had a problem discussing my emotions with true friends who care about me and this is why I am not ashamed to recommend this book for any guy who grew up putting up a persona that the world would approve of instead of the who they truly are. If you are a parent: Please don't belittle your sensitive son or daughter, for that matter. Take it from someone who suffered emotional and physical abuse from his

parents, the wounds are real and will haunt him a lifetime. It is your job as a parent to protect him in a world in which he will most likely find himself alone. And if you are a dad, well...the only thing I can say is that you should love your son for who he is, not who you want him to be. Remember he didn't come into this earth, he came out of it. The human condition has many faces and forms (attending college and accepting myself has really helped me enlighten myself). He will need a permanent, strong male role model. After two decades, I have yet to feel any love from my dad other than the one he pulls out of his wallet and although, I resent him for a lot of things, this book has helped me accept that his skewed view of what it is to be a man is paradoxically ironic for a true man is not the cold, quiet, strong figure that our culture portrays it to be but rather, one who stands up for what he believes is right.

This book references previous research as well as the author's own research on boys/men with this temperament. The book addresses the advantages and challenges in a variety of settings. It is clear and helpful. If you aren't sure if you have a sensitive boy, reading the examples in this book with probably help you to do so. It also has recommendations for how to handle sports, school/teacher environment, parenting, etc. Excellent.

All the good reviews are accurate. This is a good book. EASY read. Some points repeated but not a big deal. Chapters are short and to the point. I liked that there was many different stories from men of all ages and different backgrounds. Will give you a different perspective on things. GOOD READ. VERY HELPFUL.

This wonderful book has helped me in so many ways. At 47 I am finally allowing myself to be myself without criticism. So many of the stories in this book are similar to my own experience. I feel so much more grounded and self confident.

Dr. Zeff provides practical, directly applicable, actionable, specific council on how to deal with being highly sensitive. If you have a child that is highly sensitive this is a must read. I'm holding onto this book and going to give it to a parent/guardian with just such a child.

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