

# RAISING A HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILD

- In-Depth Guide -  
How To Raise A  
Highly Sensitive Child  
To Be Confident &  
Brave.

HEARTS · RESILIENT · LITTLE



“He’s just so sensitive!”  
“I feel like I’m walking on eggshells”  
“She’s so emotional”

If you have said any of these comments more than once, it’s highly likely that you are raising a highly sensitive child.

**Highly sensitive children are often more emotional, empathetic, creative, intelligent, deep thinkers, & often struggle with fear and anxiety more than others.**

Raising a highly sensitive child is not for the faint-hearted.

It is normal to feel exhausted & frustrated; pushed to the end of your rope & SO guilty when you do lose your temper.

Then at the same time, your heart breaks for them as they tenderly learn how to navigate a world that doesn’t always understand or accommodate to them.

**We often worry about what kind of future our highly sensitive child will have:**

Will they have the confidence to pursue what they really want in life?

Will their fears hold them back from enjoying life or pursuing things that are important to them?

Will they have friends? be bullied? or walked all over by others?

It is our job as parents to equip our children for their future.

**The good news is there are simple things you can do to raise your highly sensitive child to be confident and brave.**

Teaching our children the right mindset & practical tools to deal with fear and anxiety will empower them for their future success.

Parenting a highly sensitive child is both a privilege & responsibility.

So let’s get started...





FOOTPATH



# HIGH SENSITIVITY

It's not in your imagination.

Research has found that there is a personality trait labeled 'high sensitivity'. It is something that we are either born with or not.

Individuals with this temperament make up about 20% of the general population.

These individuals tend to be deep thinkers, creative, philosophical & often highly emotional.

The primary factors that describe this **highly sensitive temperament**, are in the acronym of **DOES**:

**Depth of processing:** they deeply integrate new information with their current world view

**Overstimulation:** they often become overwhelmed by lots of information, people, of stimulus

**Emotions & Empathy:** they are much more in touch with their emotions & empathetic to others

**Subtleties:** they are much more aware of subtle elements in the environment that others overlook.

Individuals with high sensitivity are usually highly gifted, and as adults are usually the drivers of positive change in the world.

But with this gift, also comes some elements to manage.

**Research shows that individuals with high sensitivity tend to struggle with fear & anxiety more than the general population.**

But the good news is, research shows **highly sensitive children respond very well to empathetic parental support**, & can grow up using these qualities as a gift to bring creative work into the world.



# EMPATHY

**Empathy is the ability to understand & share the feelings of another.**

It is the capacity to put yourself in someone else's shoes & see the world as they do, through non-judgmental eyes; and then communicate this understanding back to them.

**Empathy is one of your most powerful tools in supporting your highly sensitive child to deal with fear.**

This may seem counter-intuitive - like somehow you're encouraging them to feel scared. But the opposite is true.

**The more emotional safety they can find in their relationship with you, the safer they will feel in the world over time.**

For a moment, think about something that makes you feel genuinely scared or anxious.

Now imagine that the person you share those feelings with tells you that "it's silly, get over it, there's nothing to be afraid of" & forces you to take a huge leap into what you're terrified of.

Or imagine that the person you share those feelings with responds empathetically, making you feel normal. While they don't immediately force you to do what you're afraid of, they are committed to supporting small steps of progress so that you could eventually do what scares you.

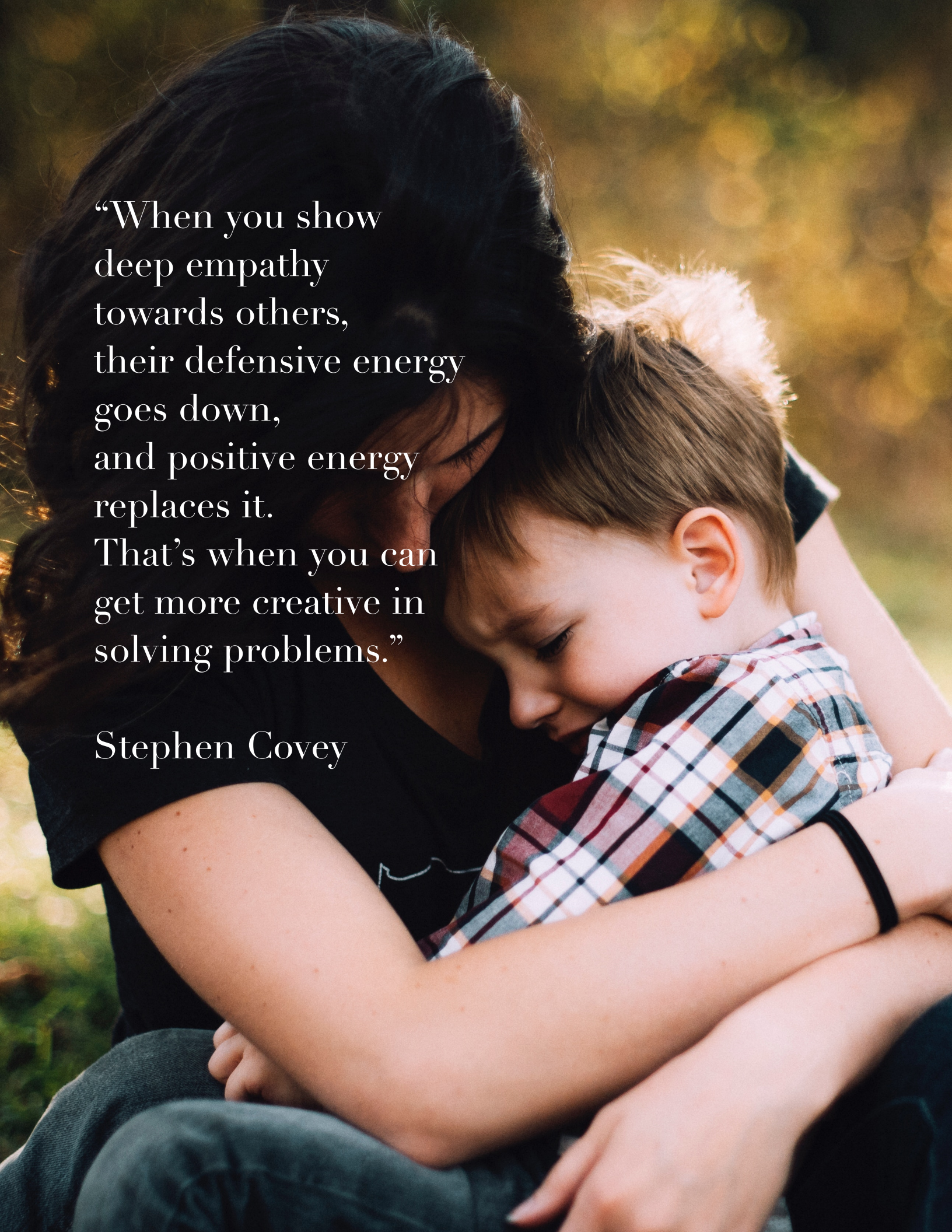
These are vastly different experiences.

Your children's fears are real.

It's important to remember that your child isn't making it up.

**When you develop an emotional safe & empathetically supportive relationship with your child, you are having a HUGE positive affect on their life.**



A close-up photograph of a woman with dark hair hugging a young boy from behind. The boy is wearing a plaid shirt and has his head resting against the woman. They are outdoors, with a blurred background of green foliage and warm, golden light, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

“When you show  
deep empathy  
towards others,  
their defensive energy  
goes down,  
and positive energy  
replaces it.  
That’s when you can  
get more creative in  
solving problems.”

Stephen Covey



# CHILDREN'S BRAINS & FEAR

When we are scared or anxious our “fight, flight, freeze” stress response becomes activated.

In these moments, our brain pumps us full of energy & stress hormones, so we can either fight the threat or run away from it.

**For children, whose brain's aren't fully developed yet to deal with big emotions, this means that they will always respond emotionally when they are scared or anxious.**

They may become physically aggressive, overtly emotional, or highly resistant to a task.

As parents, we often try to reason with our children in this emotional moment.

We believe that logically talking with them about the situation will help them calm down & see sense.

**But there's a problem - biologically they have too many stress hormones pumping through their body, & their brain is not allowing them to think clearly or rationally.**

Therefore, this moment of emotional meltdown is not the time for ‘teachable moments’ or forcing your child to take a massive jump into something that is genuinely scary for them. (You can do all of this later).

**Your primary goal when your child is having a fearful & anxious meltdown is to provide emotional safety & empathy, to help them return to a calm state.**

Once they have calmed down, they will then have the capacity to engage their rational brain in thinking through the situation more clearly.

Then you are in a position to use the strategies below to help your child deal with their fears.







# USING YOUR WORDS

One of the primary ways we deal with big emotions in a healthy way is to use our words to express them.

**Research has found that labelling our emotions dramatically reduces our stress & anxiety about the situation.**

In order to encourage your child to talk about their feelings, first of all as a parent you need to be comfortable with them talking about their feelings.

They need to know that they're not going to get into trouble for feeling a certain way.

For younger children, it is best to simplify emotions into a few options to choose from.

Eg. Sad, Mad, Glad or Scared.

If you keep repeating these options, they will eventually use them for themselves.

As your child gets older they can use more complex descriptions.

Journalling is also a very positive expression of labeling our feelings.

Encourage your older children to start a feelings journal & promise them that no one will read it unless they want them too.

# REFRAMING

Reframing is a mental skill that can look at the same situation & find different perspectives.

**When we go through situations, our emotions primarily come from the MEANING we place on the situation.**

Eg, The situation = failing a test at school.

Meaning 1 - I'm stupid & can't do anything right

Meaning 2 - Maybe I didn't study enough, if I put in more effort next time I'll get a different result

These are different perspectives on the same situations but result in vastly different emotional experiences.

**Reframing is an important skill that we must model & teach our children.**

At the beginning of teaching this, you might come up with all the different meanings you could take from the situation.

But the ultimate goal, is to help your child come up with other options themselves.

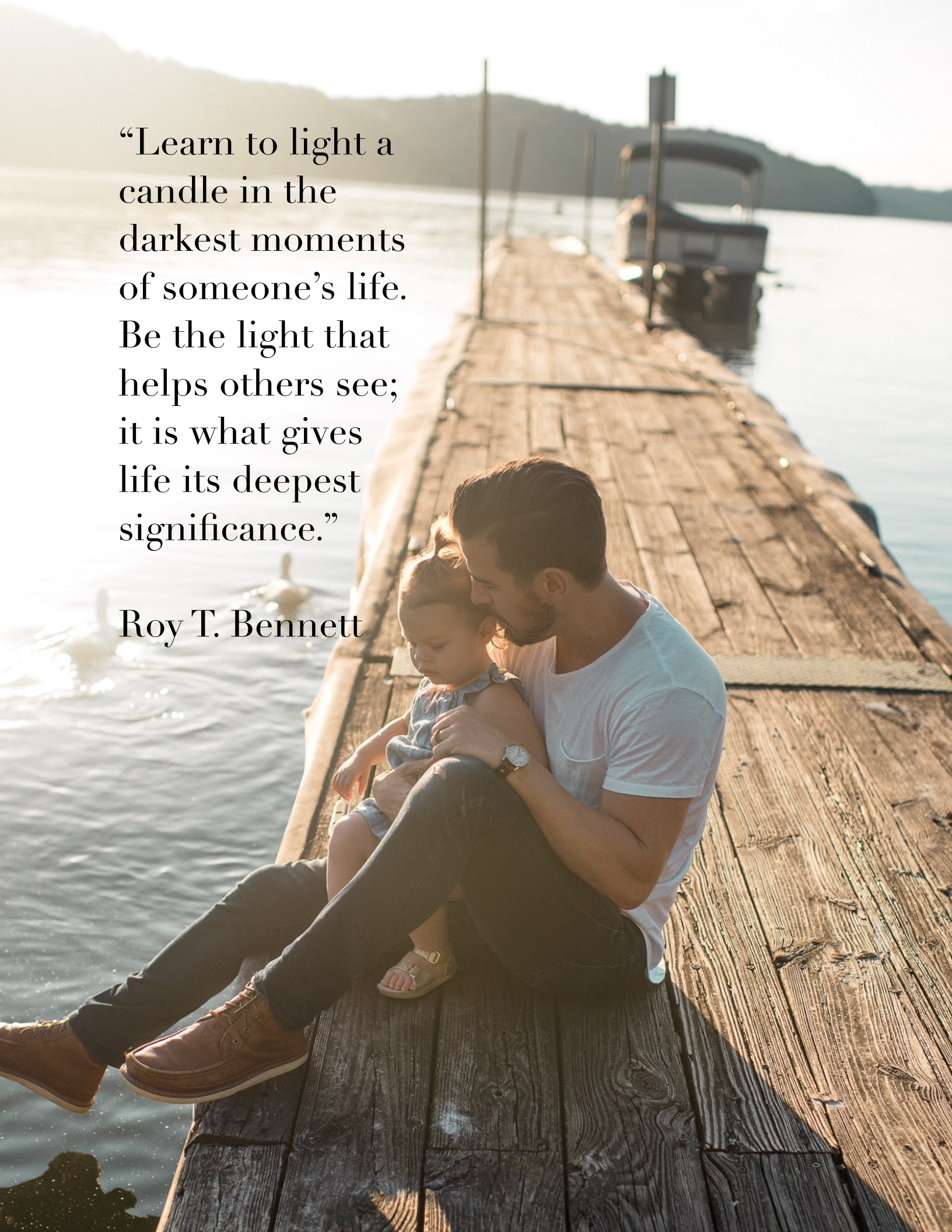
## REFRAMING QUESTIONS

1. What's the good in the bad situation?
2. How much will this matter in one year? or 5 years?
3. What is the opportunity here that you haven't yet thought about?
4. What else could this mean?
5. If this happened to your best friend, what would you tell them about it?



“Learn to light a candle in the darkest moments of someone’s life. Be the light that helps others see; it is what gives life its deepest significance.”

Roy T. Bennett





# TIME TO FACE THE FEARS

**Once we have empathized & calmed our child in the moment of meltdown, it's important that we stay committed to their overall progress of overcoming their fears.**

The right answer in the short term may be to remove them from what's stressing them out.

But long term, we cannot stay here, because in order to develop their confidence, resilience & courage they need to learn to overcome things that scare them.

**Genuine fears must be dealt with in a gradual, supported, step-by-step process over time.**

These things won't be resolved overnight or even after one great chat together.

## STEP PROCESS TO OVERCOME FEARS

- 1. Write down everything that your child is scared of.**
- 2. Choose only one or two fears to work on at a time (& relax on the rest for the moment).**
- 3. Break down the small steps they would need to take to overcome the big fear.**

eg. Young child - fear of the dark.

Step one: being in the dark with a torch & nightlight, & a parent with them.

Step two: being in the dark with a nightlight, & a parent with them.

Step three: being in the dark with a nightlight & a parent just outside their door etc.

As their parent you will know when it's time to give them a loving nudge to the next step.

**When it is time, give them some warning a few days before.**

If based on their reaction you genuinely feel they're not ready to progress a step yet, trust your intuition & celebrate being on the current step at the moment. The time will come when they're ready to give it another try.

Where possible, try to hold your ground on their current step, & don't allow them to regress backwards. This process is going to take a lot of patience, but it will be so worth it!





“When a flower doesn’t bloom,  
you fix the environment  
in which it grows,  
not the flower.”

Alexander Den Heijer



# SIMPLIFY THE STRESSORS

For highly sensitive children, their anxious reactions are not always about a specific situation, but because of a build up of lots of small stressors in their environment.

**Many times we can be unaware just how many stressors are occurring in our children's lives.**

If they are having more meltdowns than usual, consider the whole picture - has there been more stress than usual in their world?

This can come in the form of: noise, new information, too much time on technology, too much time with people, big changes in the family or at school, exposure to stressful adult issues...

## IDEAS TO SIMPLIFY:

- \* declutter their bedroom / toy room
- \* reduce the amount of bright lights or colors in their environment
- \* introduce 'quiet times' (even for older kids) - reduce the noise stimulation in the whole house or use noise cancelling headphones.
- \* reduce the number of activities they're engaged in, to give them 'white space' on their calendar
- \* have media-free times or strict boundaries on media.
- \* get clear on what media they are allowed to consume (even if it is 'age appropriate' it may still be negatively affecting your individual child).
- \* consider if they being exposed to 'adult issues' through watching the news or listening to too many adult conversations
- \* Look at their daily/weekly rhythms - are there regular times of free play, no pressure & times to decompress?
- \* Consider give them a little 'holiday' or 'mental health day' - a few hours alone of quality time with you. Even if you do not discuss any issues, a slower day can help them decompress.



# CREATE CALM DOWN RESOURCES

One of the greatest needs of your highly sensitive child, is calm & space.

By regularly giving them time & engaging in 'calming' activities, it will help them manage the overwhelm of anxious meltdowns.

**Create a list of your personal calm down activities that you know relax your child.**

Then you can use this list when you notice that your child is beginning to get overwhelmed or anxious.

## IDEAS OF CALM DOWN RESOURCES

### **For younger children:**

1. Books
2. Lego or puzzles
3. Water play
4. Exercise - running outside or on trampoline
5. Blowing bubbles
6. Listen to an audiobook
7. Play-dough
8. Fidget or spinner
9. Going outside - gardening
10. Noise cancelling headphones
11. Yoga stretches
12. Creative play - craft, painting etc.

### **For older children**

1. Books
2. Relaxation or mindfulness exercises
3. Audio books
4. Lego or puzzles or board games
5. Shower or bath
6. Yoga
7. Exercise - going for a run, jumping on the trampoline
8. Getting outside - gardening
9. Use a fidget or spinner
10. Noise cancelling headphones
11. Journalling
12. Creative play - art, craft, music, cooking.



“Courage is  
resistance to fear,  
mastery of fear,  
not absence of fear.”  
Mark Twain.





# CREATE A CULTURE OF FACING FEARS.

You can create a culture and conversation in your home that encourages your children to face their fears.

**By what we talk about, what stories we read, what teachable moments we highlight, what we celebrate - these all add up to an environment that creates courage.**

The message in our home -

“There are some things that are scary. It’s ok to feel scared. But being brave is doing something even if you’re scared. And every time you do something that you were scared of, we’re going to celebrate you!”

## HOW TO ENCOURAGE A CULTURE OF COURAGE -

1. Read books that teach about courage & being brave.
2. Create a reward system every time they take a small step towards what scares them
3. Tell them how proud you are of them & celebrate when they take a small step towards their fears
4. Tell them stories of things you were scared of in childhood & what you did to overcome them
5. When it’s a big thing they overcame, have a special dinner / family celebration / present.



“Be brave.  
Without bravery, you will never know the  
world as richly as it longs to be known.  
Without bravery, your life will remain  
small - far smaller than you probably  
wanted your life to be.”

Elizabeth Gilbert



# TRUSTING YOUR INTUITION

There are going to be some situations that complete removal of your child from the situation is appropriate.

One example of this is when a child is being bullied.

Sometimes the right answer is to support them in the current environment & reach out for help.

But other times, removal from the environment is something to consider.

The key is to **ALWAYS TRUST YOUR INTUITION** with your own child.

You may have some people give their different opinions, saying that you're 'rescuing' your child who needs to 'build resilience'.

But resilience is built through dealing with age-appropriate challenges, not leaving a child in a traumatic situation that is going to damage them long term.

And only you can make that judgment call as their parent.

So back yourself.

You don't need to answer to anyone. Your only concern is to do the best thing for your child.

# END NOTE

**What highly sensitive children need more than anything else, is an adult who responds empathetically & is an advocate for them.**

Even when we do this imperfectly and stumble our way through strategies & conversations, if we are an emotionally safe place for them, they will thrive.

Parenting a highly sensitive child is not for the faint-hearted.

It is a challenging but highly rewarding journey as you learn to see the world from a different perspective, & advocate for your child.

Your child is a gift.

Their different perspective, their creative imagination, & their tender-heart for others, are so valuable.

If we can come alongside & support them to channel their gifts in healthy & creative ways, perhaps they will take these exceptional gifts & change the world.





“Since it’s so likely that children will  
meet cruel enemies,  
let them at least have heard of  
brave knights and heroic courage.”

C.S. Lewis

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# RESILIENT LITTLE HEARTS

Resilient Little Hearts champions children  
to build resilience & emotional health  
through celebrating story-time.

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# NEXT STEPS

If you're looking for further resources to help your child deal with challenging situations, we have our children's book **"The Boy Who Stood Up Tall"**.

This book teaches children what courage really is & the practical steps to overcome their fears. In particular it empowers highly sensitive children to stand up to their fears.



To find out more about the book, [CLICK HERE](#).

We also have an in-depth resource for parents - our **BRAVE e-book**.

BRAVE will give you an exact process to follow to support your child to overcome their fears, and a list of practical tools you can use (including fun printables & activity sheets). This resource is a recommended accompaniment to "The Boy Who Stood Up Tall".

If you have a child in your life that struggles with fear or anxiety, this resource will equip you to confidently support them to overcome their fears.

To find out more about BRAVE, visit: [www.ResilientLittleHearts.com/brave](http://www.ResilientLittleHearts.com/brave)