Between Your Childhood and My Today

How your childhood shapes your life as a highly sensitive person and what you can do differently today.



Mars Kaiser

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Personal foundations

I am writing this book from a personal perspective. High sensitivity is part of my own experience. Some of the questions explored here are ones I know from childhood: Why does something affect me so deeply? Why do I immediately assume I am the one at fault?

How can I stand by myself when others do not understand me?

My memories do not provide an answer that applies to everyone. They show one person's path through life. That path includes painful experiences as well as the support of my mother and father, the affection of my grandparents, and friendships that have lasted. I do not want to leave any of that out just to make my story easier to tell.

Later, as an instructor, I supported people as they learned. It mattered to me to pay close attention, explain patiently, and not confuse a difficulty with a judgment of the whole person. I bring that approach to this book. Experience as an instructor does not make me a medical or psychotherapeutic professional.

It is part of my experience, not a license to judge your life from the outside.

You will find personal stories in the introduction and at relevant points throughout the book. Alongside them are clear explanations and examples from everyday life. The sources at the end let you trace the professional knowledge behind them.

You do not have to share my experiences to take something useful from this book. Perhaps you recognize yourself in one passage and not at all in another. I would rather you disagree with an idea than reshape your own memories to fit it. Your life is allowed to look different from mine.

Who this book is for

This book is for highly sensitive adults who want to understand their childhood better and respond more consciously in everyday family life today. It speaks particularly to you if you care for children and sometimes notice that a small incident stirs up more in you than you expected. Perhaps an argument stays with you for a long time. Perhaps you need quiet and feel guilty simply for needing it.

Your experience as an adult is at the center. We look at earlier experiences, self-worth and relationships, and finally at living with children. The examples in the parenting section range from toddlerhood to the end of primary school. Throughout, your child is seen as a person in their own right.

They do not have to have the same needs as you or be highly sensitive too.

Even if everyday family life is not your main concern right now, the chapters on self-criticism, belonging and boundaries may speak to your questions. You do not need any background in psychology. You can follow the chapters in order or start wherever something feels familiar. There is no program of assignments you have to complete.

What this book is not

This book is not a test that determines who you are. It does not make diagnoses or replace medical or psychotherapeutic treatment. Nor can a situation described here establish a diagnosis for your child.

High sensitivity is not used here to explain every difficulty. Distressing experiences, health problems and current overwhelm need attention in their own right. These suggestions are not instructions for processing trauma and do not promise a cure. If symptoms persist, severely limit your life, or memories overwhelm you, professional support can be helpful.

You do not have to work your way through this book first.

Nor are you expected to resolve every conflict calmly after reading it. The aim is to make connections easier to understand and offer possible actions you can assess for your own daily life. A book can know only so much about your circumstances. You and the people you live with deserve more attention than a blanket recommendation.

Introduction: Why I want to look back with you

As a child, I often felt misunderstood. I talked about things that made sense to me, but other children could not relate to them. Some laughed at me or teased me. Animals mattered to me.

I felt they deserved love and respect. Not everyone understood that.

I took many things personally. I blamed myself, even for things I would not hold myself responsible for today. Back then, I could not separate those things so clearly. When something was wrong, the thought that it was my fault came quickly.

Still, my story would be told wrongly if it contained only rejection. My mother and father stood by me. Both tried to understand and support me, even when they could not make sense of everything that occupied my mind. Both belong in my memories: the feeling of not being understood, and parents who were on my side.

Weekends at my grandparents' home are among my happy memories too. I was there almost every weekend, and I always enjoyed going. We played together, went for walks, and had plenty of time to talk. With them, I could be a child, and they genuinely enjoyed doing things with me.

I had friends too. Many, in fact. Two close friendships from my childhood continue to this day. I liked meeting friends, and I also liked being home on my own.

I was less fond of big birthday parties. This was not a life without closeness. To me, closeness did not have to mean sharing a room with as many people as possible.

When you look back at your childhood, you may find similar contrasts. Someone loved you and still failed to understand you at certain moments. You were unsure about one thing and surprisingly confident about another. A happy memory does not make a hurt untrue.

A hurt does not take away the place of good experiences.

I do not want this book to persuade you to reassess your entire past. Perhaps, for now, you simply want to understand why an offhand remark still stays with you so long today. Why you immediately feel guilty after an argument. Or why you suddenly speak more sharply in family life than you mean to, then condemn yourself for it afterward.

It helps to look more closely. What is really happening right now? What are you afraid of? What feels familiar from the past?

Not every difficulty today began in your childhood. Lack of sleep, too many responsibilities, or hurtful treatment can also burden you in the here and now. That is why we will not look for an old wound behind every reaction.

High sensitivity does not explain everything either. Research examines the sensitivity associated with it as a trait, not as a separate medical diagnosis. People differ in how they respond to their surroundings. You do not have to recognize yourself in every description.

Severe distress deserves attention even if you consider yourself highly sensitive. Simply assigning it to that word can get in the way of important help.

One sentence from my time as an instructor matters particularly to me. When a student said they could not do something, I replied, “No, you cannot do it yet.” That small “yet” left open the possibility of continuing to learn. It went together with patience, explanations, and attention to what each individual needed.

A sentence alone does not take away anyone's difficulty. Nor can everyone learn everything faster simply by trying hard enough.

I hope we can bring that same patience to this book. You will not have to work through assignments here. You can read, recognize something, and take a practical possibility into your daily life. Perhaps, in your next argument, all you manage at first is not to say something unfair.

Perhaps you only notice afterward that you were overwhelmed, and can then offer a clear apology.

My personal memories come from my childhood and my time as an instructor. Everyday examples show how these situations can look and what responses are possible. You will find professional sources at the end. This book does not replace medical or psychotherapeutic help, and it does not promise a cure.

We begin with your life today. With the moments when something becomes too much. From there, we look back, and later forward again: at how you treat yourself, at relationships, and at living with children. You do not have to condemn your parents or declare yourself blameless to do this.

The aim is to recognize more clearly what you are responsible for today and what you no longer have to carry alone.