

Parenting *ideas*

INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

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Raising sensitive kids

Sensitive kids benefit from having an optimistic and resilient parent that supports them and can teach them how to recognise their own emotional state.

Do you have a sensitive child?

You know, a child who takes everything you or others say to heart; a child who has a thin skin and worries too much, particularly about things out of their control.

Sensitive kids worry about what others think of them. They often sense danger well before others and they see the consequences of behaviours well before their peers.

Is this sensitivity nature or nurture? I suspect the former is the culprit. It has been estimated that 15 per cent of children are born with a more sensitive temperament. That is, a temperament that makes them particularly aware of their surroundings and of any changes that may occur.

Sensitive kids are like mood detectives with their antennae up trying to detect subtle changes in the moods of those around them. In some ways this is healthy as emotionally intelligent people are tuned into the behaviours and feelings of others. Sensitive kids generally have high emotional intelligence quotients.

However, typically sensitive kids often read too much into what others say or do. Sometimes parents will say something without thinking or a friend will ignore them for a whole day for no other reason than they were self-centred. Sensitive kids take these matters to heart. They take the mistakes of others and turn them into something they are not. They see a simple blunder and see it as a personal

slight or something sinister. Sensitive kids can think too much and read too much into simple situations. That's why sensitive kids can become anxious, shy or both. They can be hard to live with.

If you have a sensitive child you need to see and appreciate both their sides. The side we most often see is the shy, inhibited, fearful worrier. The flipside is that sensitive kids generally have kind hearts; are empathetic, intuitive and usually possess a creative streak. These are wonderful attributes to have.

As the world kids inhabit at school is akin to a jungle, sensitive souls can leave themselves open to being hurt by their peers. Kids who wear their hearts on their sleeves can sometimes be given a harder time by unthinking peers just as those who look and act a little different than the norm are susceptible.

Recent research into the area of children's sensitivity revealed that around 40% of sensitive kids experience some form of real anxiety.

The secret to the 60% of kids who DON'T experience anxiety are certain 'protective' factors. The top of this list is parenting style. Sensitive kids benefit from having an optimistic, resilient parent who supports them but doesn't allow them to take themselves too seriously. It also helps if parents can encourage their child to take risks socially and applaud their social successes, no matter how

minor. Parents need to show their child how to recognise their own emotional state and in doing so better manage their emotions so they can live happy, more productive lives.

The double whammy for kids of sensitivity and negative or pessimistic parents is not ideal. Kids need a parent who gets across the message that there are some unpleasant events but they can cope with them. Parents need to recognise their own emotions and respond in order to help their child recognise and regulate their emotional state.

It is good if parents are supportive; even better if a parent is resilient so that the sensitive child sees how to cope with some of life's hurts, rejections and disappointments. In fact, sensitive kids are less likely to develop anxiety if at least one parent is of the 'thick-skinned', positive, even jovial type. This reinforces that the world really is a great place and not full of uncertainty and danger.

When sensitive kids are raised in a balanced way with proper understanding and encouragement, they are well-placed to grow up to be happy, healthy, unusually well-adjusted and creative adults.

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