

Dr Elaine Aron presented a good way to summarize the HSP trait with the acronym DOES, which stands for...

Depth of processing (we tend to process more information in a deeper way)

Overstimulation (when you take in so many details you tend to get overstimulated, HSPs tend to get more stressed with overstimulation)

Emotionally responsive (more brain activity to both positive and negative stimulus)

Sensitivity to subtle stimuli (we take in details and information that others might miss)

Try paying attention to your inner talk. What if we were to use self-compassion instead? I know when I first started learning this it seemed impossible to really believe. But when I learned about how the brain literally grows a particular part that becomes easier to access the more you practice it, I started to try it out. Because this is a brain exercise, you get better at it the more you practice. Think of it like building a muscle. If you keep doing it, you get stronger at it. One of my favorite methods is adapted from Kristin Neff, a psychologist who studies self-compassion.

There are three steps:

1. Put your hand on your chest because it activates a calming response and then acknowledge the suffering. (i.e., I feel overwhelmed, sad, scared, fearful, abandoned, unworthy, etc.). When you can name an emotion you activate the cognitive part of the brain and can start to cut the pain in half just by doing this first step.
2. In the second step, we need to validate and normalize. For example, you might say to yourself, "It makes sense to me that I feel [fill in the blank] (validations). Other HSPs would likely feel the same way if they were experiencing this too." (normalizing). This step is incredibly powerful for HSPs and cannot be skipped.
3. In the final step, you want to check in with your needs. Ask yourself in a loving tone what you need right in this moment. I might also say, "I know this feeling is temporary, and I am going to get through it. Maybe I'm tired right now and need a break or to eat something." Sometimes, it's simple like that. Or maybe you realize you need to get some support. The point of these steps is that they activate a soothing response.