

The Gift of Emotional Overexcitabilities

By Regina Hellinger

Recent vulnerability research by Brene Brown (Brown, 2010) has shown that the origin of all creativity, innovation, and authenticity is vulnerability. For many gifted individuals it is their emotional overexcitabilities that are the source of their greatest vulnerabilities. The discovery that these vulnerabilities are also the birthplace of their ability to use their gifts in creative and innovative ways serves as a wakeup call to reassess our perceptions on these overexcitabilities and how we address them in our young gifted. Many of our gifted individuals have been taught, conditioned, and drawn to hide their sensitivity from the world as a protective measure and for the sake of fitting in with society. This new research raises the question: How can the gifts of our gifted be given to the world if they are being suppressed and beaten back as if they were formidable enemies?



The gift of a child with an emotional overexcitability is pushed down with shame for not fitting in with society and not being “tough enough” to deal with things that others are able to easily brush off. Often fixing the problem turns into bottling up the experience and numbing the self through disconnection. So what happens now? The individual may seem to be adjusting or maturing. Parents, teachers, and loved ones are relieved. As a result, children are sent reinforcing messages that their strategy of denying their authentic self is a good one.

Difficult questions continue to arise; in our attempts to save our children with emotional overexcitabilities from pain, have we run the risk of stealing their authentic selves from them? The follow up question is even harder: Have we even been successful in helping them experience less pain or have they been successful at hiding their experiences from the rest of the world, even those that love them most?

What if, instead of getting them to “outgrow” their extreme sensitivity, we helped them acknowledge it, nurture it, and appreciate the gift that they have to be more sensitive than other people could ever imagine being? What if, instead of burying it deep within, we became role models and were able to explore not only how being deeply sensitive can lead to experiences of intense pain, but also experiences of intense joy, love, and connection? What if we encouraged our sensitive gifted to be courageous to show their unique, sensitive self to the world, both in pain and in connection? What would be possible for these sensitive souls then? What would be possible for those around them?

I wonder if it is possible that the greatest antidote to the pain of being highly sensitive is actually the joy of being highly sensitive, in experiencing all of being vulnerable. Would the connection with others who are willing to be seen for who they are generate courage to show compassion for even those that find our sensitivities intolerable? Would the connection made through this compassion open the hearts of the intolerant to rethink their own selves, instead of having the sensitive experience shame for being their amazing selves? Is the answer to this simply to pave the way for our highly sensitive to embrace who they are, to love themselves as they are, and love themselves enough to share their authentic self with the world, without any need for apology? The best, and final, question is this: What gifts are awaiting to reveal themselves from this sacred place of vulnerability, and what impacts will this have on the world?

Citation:

Brown, Brene. (2010). *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You are Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are*. Minnesota: Hazeldon.

→ How?

