

# CHILDREN, PSI & SENSITIVITY

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## MY POSITIONALITY

- ❖ Highly Sensitive Person with bio, sensory & emotional sensitivities
- ❖ Life-long 'experiencer' of psi / EHEs
- ❖ Parapsychology researcher
- ❖ Professional certified HSP Coach & CYP Practitioner
- ❖ Scholar of mystery school philosophy
- ❖ Mum of two sensitive children
- ❖ Community leader for sensitive seekers
- ❖ Sensitivity is a growing and important aspect of consciousness research itself – *and I am on a mission!*

*[belong.theifcrowd.com](http://belong.theifcrowd.com)*

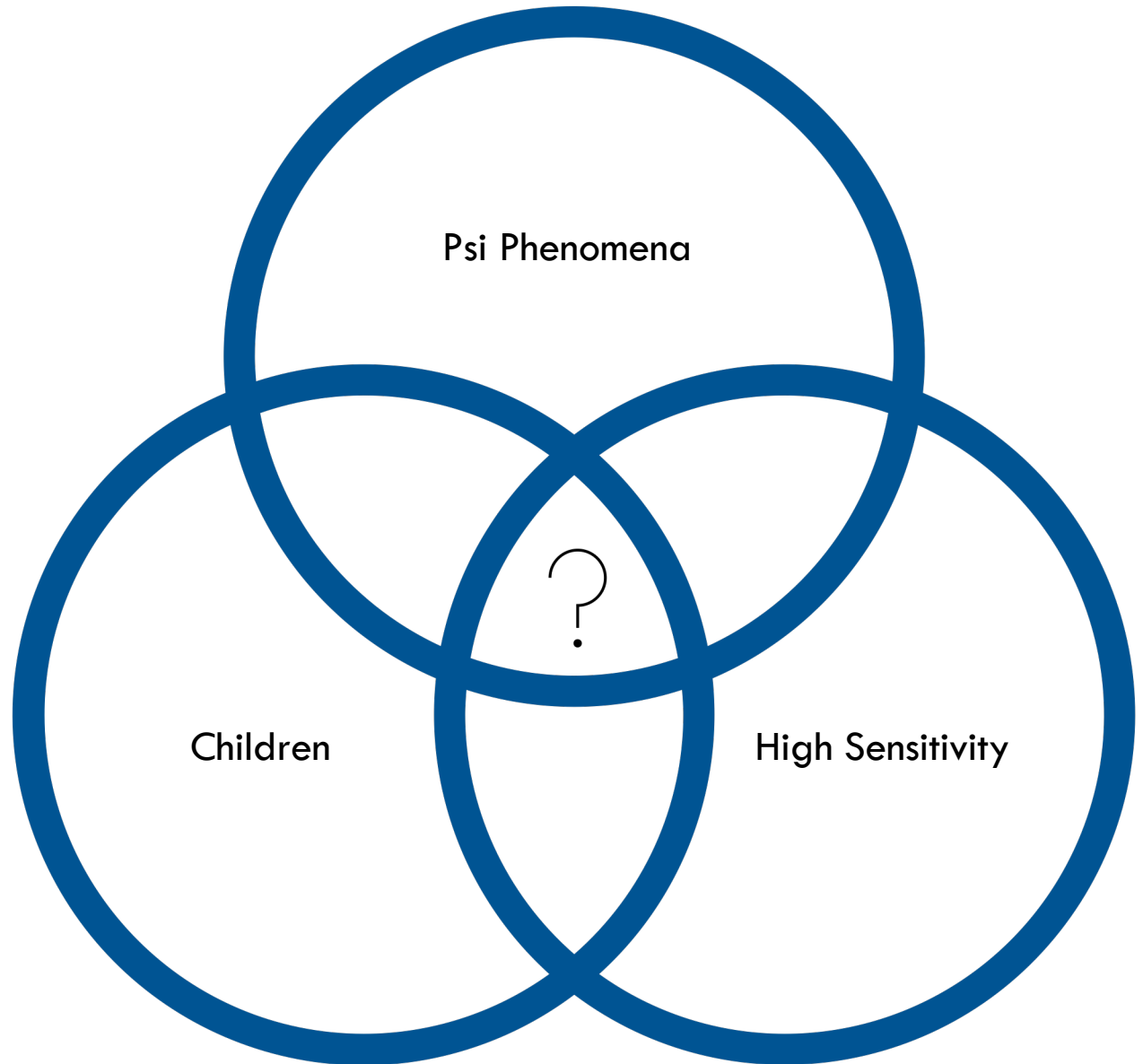
# AN INTERSECTION

- ❖ What are psi phenomena?
- ❖ What does it mean to be 'Highly Sensitive'?
- ❖ What might children's psi experiences be hinting at?



Q) Have you had an experience?

Q) What do you think is at the centre?



**“All science should start  
from the natural history of  
what people experience”**

*- Rupert Sheldrake*





# AN ADULT LENS

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Our lenses impose form



# CHILDREN'S PSI EXPERIENCES

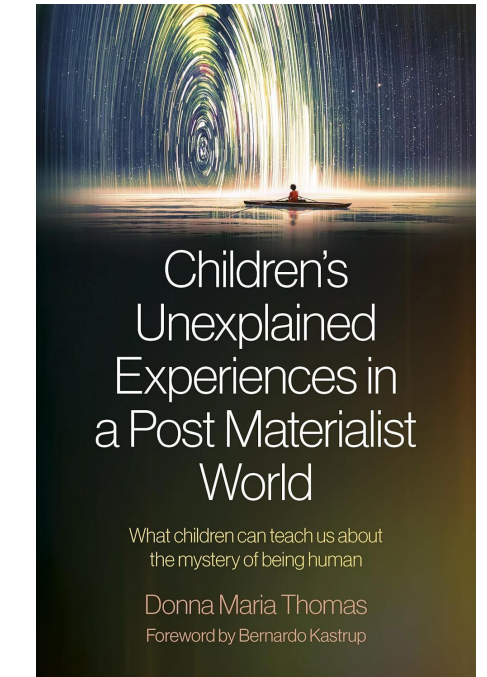
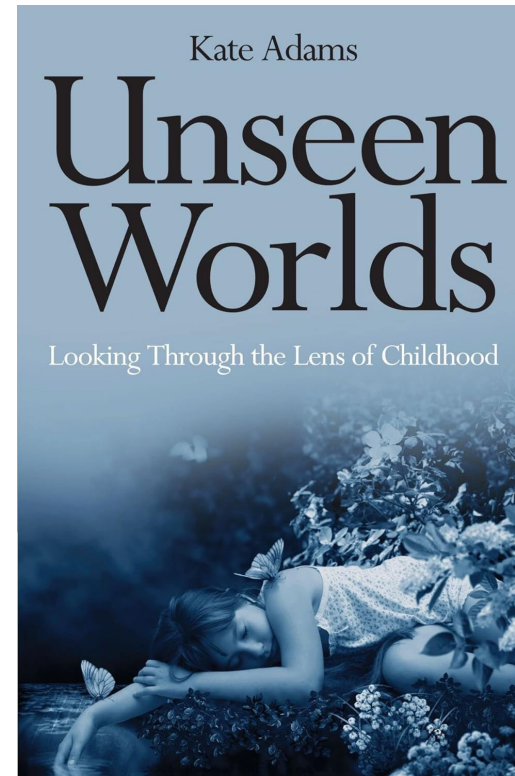
❖ I had my own!

❖ Did you?

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❖ See Donna Thomas' work...

❖ See Kate Adams' work...





# WHAT IS HIGH SENSITIVITY?

- ❖ Aron & Aron (1997) coined the term '*Highly Sensitive Person*' (HSP)
- ❖ Characterised by thinking and feeling deeply
- ❖ Often known as '*Sensory Processing Sensitivity*' (SPS)
- ❖ Not to be confused with sensory processing disorders
- ❖ Recently referred to as '*Environmental Sensitivity*' (ES)
- ❖ Likened to being an 'Orchid'
- ❖ Challenges / 'vantage sensitivity' (Pluess & Belsky, 2013)
- ❖ Aron offers the handy acronym of key

attributes: DOES

**D**epth of processing  
**O**verstimulation  
**E**mpathy  
**S**ensitive to **subt**le

<https://hsperson.com/>

**"It's like feeling and experiencing everything in HD"**

Roxburgh (2022)



# THIS COULD BE...

Aghh! My eyes! Tendency to be startled by bright light, loud or sudden noise, busy places...

Sensitive to own inner experiences to e.g. pain, other bodily sensations. Maybe you have a “sensitive system”.

Affected by emotions – also emotions and moods of others

Cushion-fluffer, light- dimmer... Just know how to care for others

Moved by arts, music, nature, animal friends

Drawn to caring and healing professions

Darn twitchy nervous system! Alert! Imposter Syndrome?

Can often feel a bit ‘overly-tasked’... eek... Grump!

Conflict averse, avoid violent movies and activities

Rich inner-life, imagination and dreams

Often (mis)described by others as shy or ‘too sensitive’ 🙄

You actually, just need alone time... (but may feel guilty about it)

Unusual sensory experiences... maybe even regularly?





# PROS AND CONS

(A SPECTRUM OF EXPERIENCE?)



Tendency to experience anxiety and self-doubt  
(yet high self-awareness)



Sensory overwhelm  
(yet high acuity)



Hyper-empathy  
(the good, the bad and the...)



Need for depth and meaning-making  
(you are intelligent, creative and with good memory)



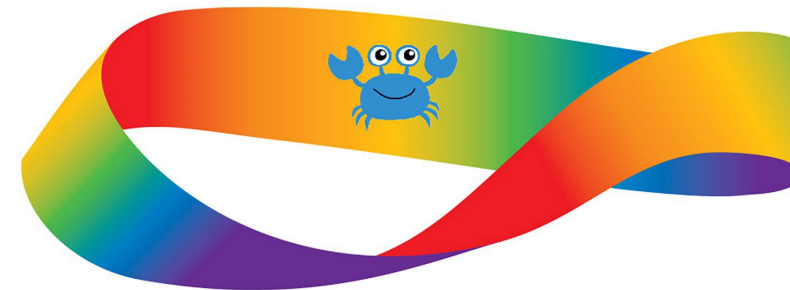
Boundary thinness and 'Transliminality'  
(you can transcend Self / No-Self)



Feeling different or othered for being 'weird'  
(you belong to a select club :P)



Misunderstood in an insensitive culture  
(you are a natural leader)



**BOTH AND ...?**



**TAKE THE TEST**

Various scales have been developed by Aron et al., including for children.

Here is an easy distilled 'checklist' for a quick look as adults:

All of the materials are available on  
<https://hsperson.com/>

1. I am easily overwhelmed by strong sensory input.
2. I seem to be aware of subtleties in my environment.
3. Other people's moods affect me.
4. I tend to be very sensitive to pain.
5. I find myself needing to withdraw during busy days, into bed or into a darkened room or any place where I can have some privacy and relief from stimulation.
6. I am particularly sensitive to the effects of caffeine.
7. I am easily overwhelmed by things like bright lights, strong smells, coarse fabrics, or sirens close by.
8. I have a rich, complex inner life.
9. I am made uncomfortable by loud noises.
10. I am deeply moved by the arts or music.





- 11. My nervous system sometimes feels so frazzled that I just have to go off by myself.
- 12. I am conscientious.
- 13. I startle easily.
- 14. I get rattled when I have a lot to do in a short amount of time.
- 15. When people are uncomfortable in a physical environment I tend to know what needs to be done to make it more comfortable (like changing the lighting or the seating).
- 16. I am annoyed when people try to get me to do too many things at once.
- 17. I try hard to avoid making mistakes or forgetting things.
- 18. I make a point to avoid violent movies and TV shows.
- 19. I become unpleasantly aroused when a lot is going on around me.
- 20. Being very hungry creates a strong reaction in me, disrupting my concentration or mood.



- 21. Changes in my life shake me up.
- 22. I notice and enjoy delicate or fine scents, tastes, sounds, works of art.
- 23. I find it unpleasant to have a lot going on at once.
- 24. I make it a high priority to arrange my life to avoid upsetting or overwhelming situations.
- 25. I am bothered by intense stimuli, like loud noises or chaotic scenes.
- 26. When I must compete or be observed while performing a task, I become so nervous or shaky that I do much worse than I would otherwise.
- 27. When I was a child, my parents or teachers seemed to see me as sensitive or shy.



# HOW DID YOU SCORE?

- ❖ 14 or more is considered HSP
- ❖ Fewer items but with very strong agreement is also considered HSP
- ❖ For many... DOES applies even more
- ❖ No test is absolute. This is just a guide
- ❖ Similar questions are asked for highly sensitive children with specificity
- ❖ See [hsperson.com/](http://hsperson.com/) for details





# SAMPLE HS CHILD SCALE QUESTIONS

- ❖ I love nice smells.
- ❖ I am annoyed when people try to get me to do too many things at once.
- ❖ When someone observes me, I get nervous. This makes me perform worse than normal.

(Pluess, et al., 2018)



# THREE SUBSCALES

Ease of Excitation (EOE): more easily overwhelmed by inner or outer world...

Low Sensory Threshold (LST): noticing detail, nuance that others would miss...

Aesthetic Sensitivity (AES): being affected by art, nature...

# CURIOUS RESEARCH FINDINGS



- ❖ Innate trait (with evolutionary advantage...)
- ❖ 20% of the population (50% in therapy). it's *numerically* real!
- ❖ Found in other species too, e.g.; the wolf, cat, horse...
- ❖ Brain structure & activity is different e.g. more activity in mirror neurons
- ❖ Process social / emotional information *especially* fast and deep
- ❖ Displayed overtly in social caution, attention to detail, big questions.
- ❖ Experienced inwardly as awareness of nuance... big questions
- ❖ More responsive to physical / environmental stimuli (that others would likely miss). More curiosities e.g. ASMR, misophonia
- ❖ More affected by subtle environmental effect e.g. 'sick building syndrome' and electrical or chemical sensitivity (Jawer, 2005, 2007)
- ❖ More responsive to psychological material (that others would likely miss). More altered states of consciousness.
- ❖ Vivid dreamers, meaning-makers and seekers
- ❖ Have more anomalous or 'exceptional human' experiences...



# ...IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY?

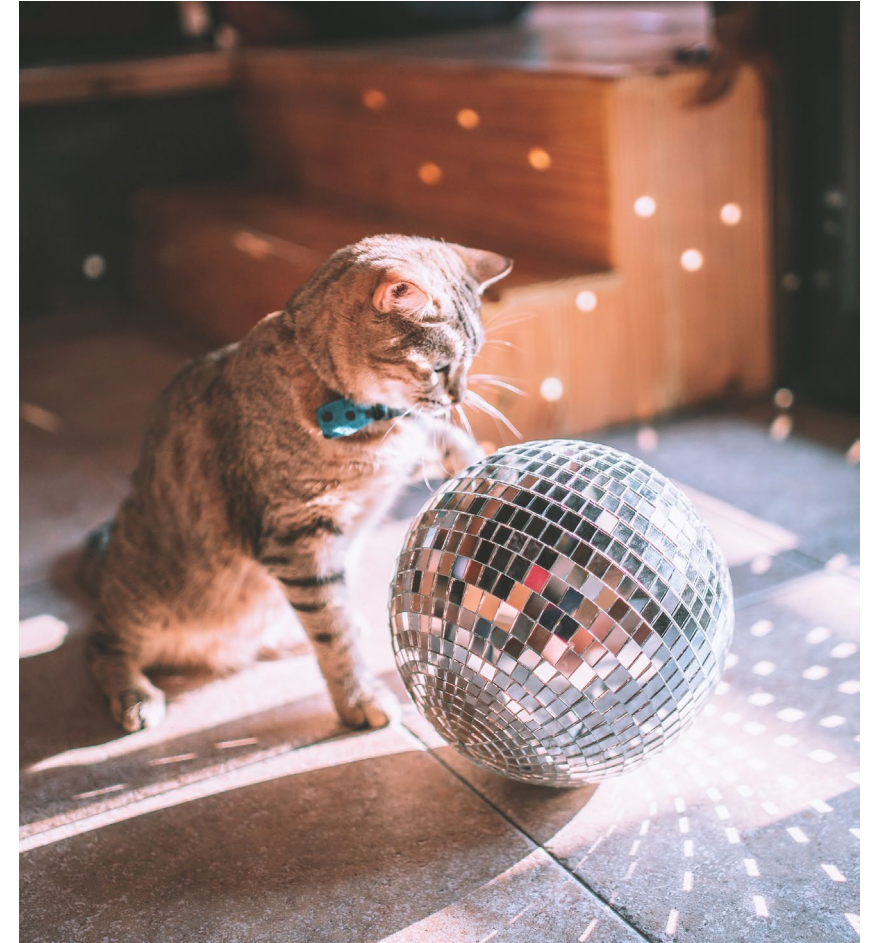
- ❖ In the past Albert Budden (1994) referred to sensitivity in his work on UFO experiencers (poss link to Persinger?)
- ❖ HSPs report more prior psi and exceptional experiences (Irwin, Schofield and Baker, 2015). Poss link to the 'aesthetic' dimension of the trait.
- ❖ Watt and Brandon (2008) found link to EMF (and hauntings?)
- ❖ Williams and Blagrove (2022) on 'EVP' and degraded voices
- ❖ Jonsson, Grim and Kjellgren (2014) noted that HSP had more mystical experiences...induced by sensory restriction techniques – i.e. in float tanks!
- ❖ The Aesthetic Dimension of the trait is emerging as a significant indicator
- ❖ A 'Recipe for Success' (coined by Charles Honorton): suggests key traits e.g. openness, creativity, extraversion, prior psi experience, practice of a mental discipline, positive emotions and more...
- ❖ Current ongoing research: traits, states, Dreams, Dream ESP, Floatation, sensing 'thin' spaces and so on...



# WHAT I SUSPECT...

In the HSP we have a natural recipe for psi success: their 'embodied liminality'

- ❖ Embodiment (gut feeling...)
- ❖ Liminality (in an unfixed state of being...)
- ❖ hence 'Embodied Liminality'
- ❖ Intuitive thinking style (other ways of 'knowing'...)
- ❖ Unusual sensory experiences that 'blend' or compromise a fixed reality
- ❖ Sliding around states of consciousness
- ❖ Childhood and adult psi experiences (self-normalised, familiar)
- ❖ Runs in families (normalised, familiar)
- ❖ Appreciation of symbolism, metaphor and deeper meaning
- ❖ Transpersonal or spiritual interests that support psi
- ❖ Appreciation of synchronicity, psychic experiences, intuitive practices, dream content and so on - as a norm
- ❖ Not afraid to be open





# KEY POINTS



## AWARENESS



### Fluidity and interconnectivity:

- 'Altered States of Consciousness'
- Sense of Self and others is fluid
- Sensory information is more abundant and, less 'fixed'
- meaning-making and depth is central to being





## HOW DOES RELATE TO CHILDREN?

- ❖ Curiosity
- ❖ Play
- ❖ Self Experimentation
- ❖ Openness to new experience
- ❖ Lack of fixed self / ego
- ❖ Lack of fixed ontology
  
- ❖ ...what do you think?

**CHILDREN PLAY  
WITH ALTERED  
STATES OF  
CONSCIOUSNESS**

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# CHILDREN PLAY WITH THEIR IDENTITY

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# CHILDREN EXPERIMENT WITH THEIR SENSES

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**CHILDREN MAKE  
MEANING  
UNINHIBITED BY  
RULES**

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ALL CHILDREN  
ARE CLOSE TO  
LIMINAL LIFE...

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# IN CHILDREN...

- ❖ Fluidity of states of consciousness
- ❖ Spend more time dreaming than adults do
- ❖ Unfixed 'material world'
- ❖ Identity and Self is less formed
- ❖ Thinner boundaries with others
- ❖ Greater sensory flexibility
- ❖ Closer to a pre-living time (before being 'made')
- ❖ Perfect candidates for psi?
- ❖ .. They *embody liminality*



# ...HIGHLY SENSITIVE CHILDREN?



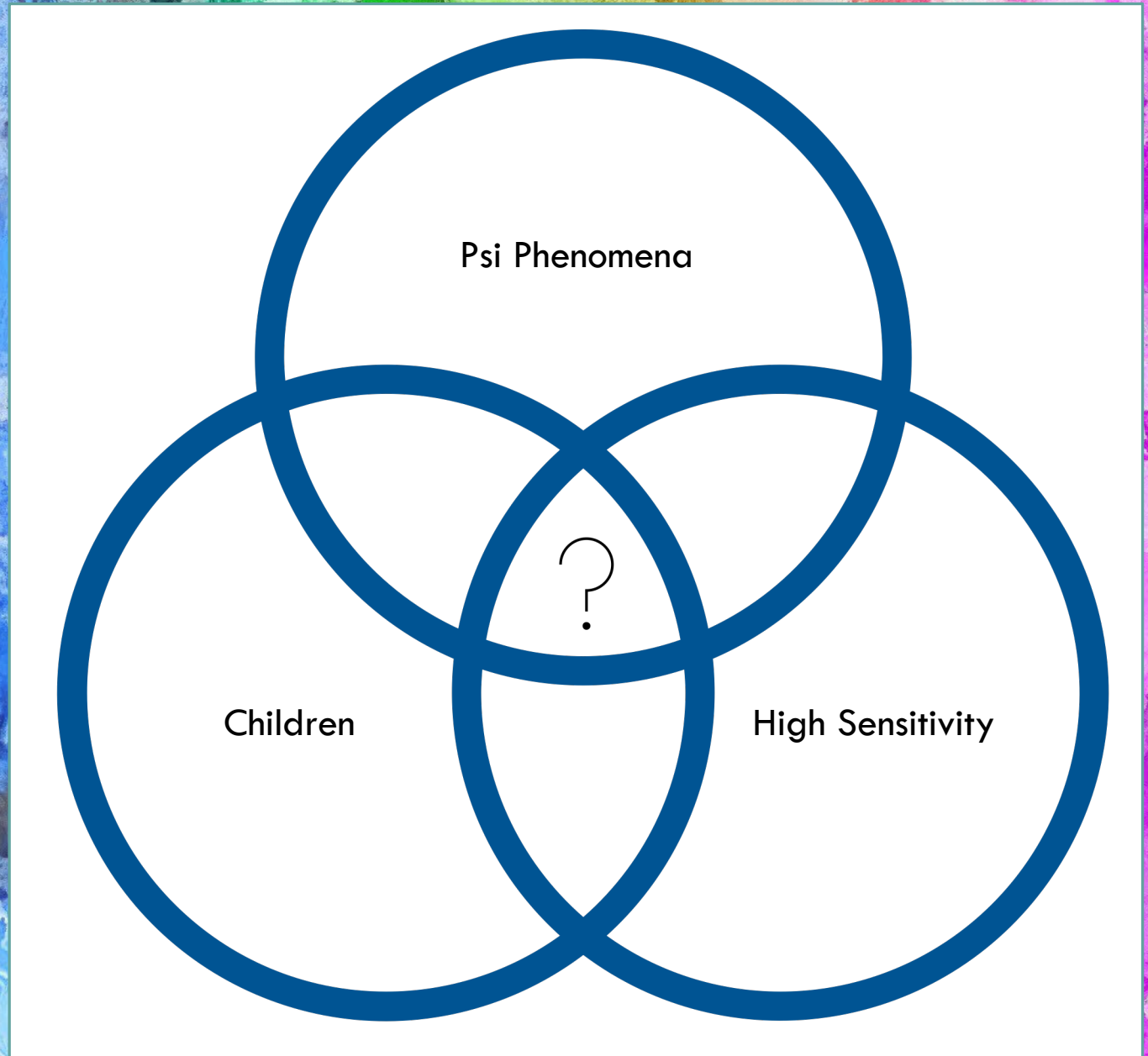
The 20 percent of children are highly sensitive and:

- ❖ they have more dream recall, and with meaning than most
- ❖ they have rich imaginal lives
- ❖ they are more empathic than most
- ❖ they shift states of consciousness more readily
- ❖ they have thinner boundaries and less fixed sense of Self
- ❖ they experience more sensory information than most
- ❖ they process it more deeply than most
- ❖ they create or attribute meaning to that information
- ❖ they are closer to the 'ground of being'



# INTERSECTION:

- ❖ New frontier of inquiry
- ❖ Benefits to HSC wellbeing
- ❖ Benefits to HSC development





# IT'S NOT NEW... NOT BY A LONG SHOT

Advaita Vedānta, Zen, Yoga and Taoism (in the East) and Kabbalah, Hermeticism, and Neo-Platonic perennialism (in the West) teach:

Awareness of god/source/All through unity, dissolution of the self (no-self) practices, and sensory withdrawal e.g. Pratyahāra

Such philosophies are grounded in subtle Universal nuanced principles, e.g. 'Hermetic Principles' that are only available to those sensitive/open enough to receive them

These principles are felt and 'known', a natural embodied sense or state of consciousness where 'the magic happens'

Devotees spend their lives trying to gain the insights through this lens of sensitivity to the subtle

The 'proof' of the devotee is mastery of their extra-sensory 'knowing' and ability to affect the world (e.g. manifesting/PK)

Psi research is, well... becoming a living body of support for mysticism

HSPs hold great insight, even though they may just not realise it... and our sensitive children? They just might be the wisest of all.

Camille Flammarion. Title: The Flammarion Engraving 1888





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