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## *The diary of a teenage empath*

Being sensitive has a downside—and an upside.

BY JEANNETTE FOLAN

Moodiness, depression, fatigue and anxiety are all fairly common challenges for nearly 20% of today's teens. The causes that contribute to teen mental health issues can include peer/social pressures, school performance, hormones, genetics and environmental factors, to name a few. One cause that might now be added to that list is sensory processing sensitivity (SPS), which is a trait related to an increased sensitivity to sensory stimulation. Those who have the trait, estimated to be 15-20% of the population, are called a highly sensitive person (HSP).

Some of the characteristics of an HSP include being adverse to confrontation, loud places, crowds, rules and routine. Many get bored and distracted easily and can have digestive problems. They also require a significant amount of alone time. At first glance, the HSP trait might not sound like such a big deal, but I can tell you first-hand, it is.

I struggled with it my whole life, although I didn't know it had a name until a few years ago. I was deeply affected by the energy of the people and environment around me. There were times the related depression and anxiety were almost crippling. Because I couldn't identify any external reason for how I felt, I thought I was going crazy. That notion plagued me as much as the effects of the actual trait.

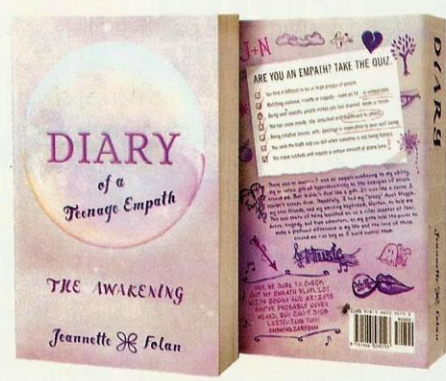
My initial research uncovered two significant things: one, that there are HSPs called empaths who have an extra "sixth sense." These people, thought

to be roughly 5% of the population, can pick up the physical symptoms and illnesses of others and are highly intuitive and creative. Secondly, I noticed that none of the material that addressed the subject of HSP teens was written for teens. That was something I hoped to change because, for me, learning about the SPS trait and acquiring some coping skills improved the quality of my life exponentially. For sensitive teens, I knew that understanding this aspect about them might be a big step forward in their health and wellness development.

But how could I get teens to read a self-help book? My best answer: *Diary of a Teenage Empath—The Awakening*, a teen drama that tells the story of a young girl and her group of high school friends who experience the highs and lows of being highly sensitive/empaths. Not unlike how parents blend vegetables in their kid's spaghetti sauce, woven into the fast-paced novel are details about HSPs/empaths, research data, as well as practical exercises and coping skills.

Ironically, most of the readers so far are not teenagers. The comments and emails I've received include remarkable stories from adult readers who express relief to discover they are an HSP/empath. Some have said they are passing the book along to their child or the teenager of a friend they know is struggling—and that's a good start.

Getting the novel in the hands of teenagers is a gratifying challenge, as well



as the next HSP/empath project: collaborating on the development of an after-school club with workbooks designed to guide highly sensitive teens through stress and anxiety with engaging exercises, energy medicine techniques and group discussions that promote self-care and wellness.

Reaching kids through schools, where they have an adult support structure and can form interactive peer groups, is key to not only raising awareness of the sensitivity subject, but also providing viable tools to manage it. **2**

Jeannette Folan is an author, trainer and student focusing on mind/body/spirit development, especially for highly sensitive teens.  
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The novel *Diary of a Teenage Empath* is currently available from Amazon, iTunes and all other online retailers. More information about the novel and upcoming workbook can be found at [www.empathdiary.com](http://www.empathdiary.com)