

Please Note

High sensory-processing sensitivity in dogs is still quite a new field of study. The first paper characterizing and validating a means of measuring it in dogs was published in 2017,¹ and the concept is only now beginning to filter into veterinary practice.²

This book weaves together the current science and my personal and professional experience with highly sensitive dogs and highly sensitive individuals of other species, particularly horses.

As I may never get to meet you and your dog, this book is simply for educational purposes, to familiarize you with the concepts and characteristics of high sensory-processing sensitivity in dogs and to offer some practical suggestions for managing these wonderful dogs in everyday life.

If you are dealing with a problematic behavior in your dog that compromises anyone's safety or well-being, I encourage you to consult a veterinary behavior specialist who is familiar with the research on highly sensitive dogs.

¹ Braem M, Asher L, Furrer S, *et al.* Development of the “Highly Sensitive Dog” questionnaire to evaluate the personality dimension “Sensory Processing Sensitivity” in dogs. *PLoS ONE*, 2017; 12(5): e0177616.

² Braem M. Sensory processing sensitivity and the importance of individuality and personality in veterinary medicine. *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice*, 2024; 54(1): 181–193.

Foreword

In the first edition of *The Highly Sensitive Dog*, I began by asking the question:

‘Is there a canine equivalent to the highly sensitive person?’

My answer — yes, it’s the highly sensitive dog — has a small but solid foundation in the scientific literature, although the genetic basis for this trait in dogs has yet to be fully explored.

In the first edition, I discussed one study in particular, which showed that at least a couple of the features of high sensory-processing sensitivity in dogs (noise sensitivity and fearfulness toward strangers and novel situations) have clear genetic bases.

That study was the impetus for a series of three blog posts which I later turned into a short e-book. My primary focus, then and now, is on the practicalities of living with these wonderful dogs and making life easier for them, and for ourselves in return.

In this second edition, I delve into some of the other studies on canine sensory-processing sensitivity and how they can inform the daily management of highly sensitive dogs. I also include the HSD questionnaire in this edition.

The body of research on specific personality traits associated with sensory-processing sensitivity in animals is already fairly weighty, even though this is an emerging field of study. So to keep this book fairly short, easy to read, and practical for people living with highly sensitive dogs, I’ve limited the discussion to just a handful of what I consider to be key studies at this time. There are sure to be more as research continues.

This edition is divided into two sections:

Part 1 explores some of the science on sensory-processing sensitivity in people and dogs, with a little about horses thrown in as well where there are gaps in the science on behavioral reactivity in dogs.

Part 2 presents some practical strategies for managing highly sensitive dogs, based on my personal and professional experience. There is some science in this section, too, although the focus is squarely on living with these wonderful dogs.

If you want to jump right to Part 2, please be sure to come back and read Part 1 when you're done. Part 2 will be much more useful when you understand its underpinnings.

Enjoy!