JUDITH ORLOFF, MD

New York Times bestselling author of *Emotional Freedom*

THE EMPATH'S SURVIVAL GUIDE

Life Strategies *for* Sensitive People

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sounds true
BOULDER, COLORADO

For Corey Folsom

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Praise for *The Empath's Survival Guide*

Our innate capacity for empathy is the source of the most precious of all human qualities.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Chapter 1

ARE YOU AN EMPATH?

Introduction to Empathy

I'm a physician with fourteen years of conventional medical training at

USC and UCLA. I am also an empath. In my medical practice of over two

decades, I specialize in treating highly sensitive people like myself. Though there is a spectrum of sensitivity that exists in human beings, empaths are emotional sponges who absorb both the stress and joy of the world. We feel everything, often to an extreme, and have little guard up between others and ourselves. As a result, we are often overwhelmed by excessive stimulation and are prone to exhaustion and sensory overload.

I'm so passionate about this topic both professionally and personally because

I've had to develop specific strategies to manage the challenges of being an empath myself. These allow me to protect my sensitivities so I can maximize their benefits—and there are *so* many! I want to share with you how to become a balanced, empowered, and happy empath. To thrive, you must learn ways to

avoid taking on the energy, symptoms, and stress of others. I also want to educate your loved ones and peers—family, coworkers, bosses, parents, and

romantic partners—on how best to support and communicate with you. In this book, I will show you how to accomplish these goals.

I offer *The Empath's Survival Guide* as a resource for kindred sensitive souls to find understanding and acceptance in a world that is often coarse, heartless, and disdainful of sensitivity. In it, I challenge the status quo and create a new normal for how to view sensitivity, wherever you are on the spectrum. There is

nothing "wrong" with being sensitive. In fact, you are about to discover what's

most "right" about yourself. Through this book, its companion audio program, *Essential Tools for Empaths,* and my workshops for empaths, I

want to create a community of support so that you can find your tribe, be authentic, and shine. I

want to support a movement of people who honor their sensitivities. Welcome to

a circle of love! My message to you is one of hope and acceptance. I encourage you to embrace your gifts and manifest your full power on the empath journey.

WHAT IS AN EMPATH?

Empaths have an extremely reactive neurological system. We don't have the

same filters that other people do to block out stimulation. As a consequence, we

absorb into our own bodies both the positive and stressful energies around us.

We are so sensitive that it's like holding something in a hand that has fifty fingers instead of five. We are truly super responders.

Research shows that high sensitivity affects approximately 20 percent of the

population, though the degree of one's sensitivity can vary. [1] Empaths have often been labeled as "overly sensitive" and told to "get a thicker skin." As children and adults, we are shamed for our sensitivities rather than supported. We may experience chronic exhaustion and want to retreat from the world because it often feels so overwhelming. But at this point in my life, I wouldn't give up being an empath for anything. It lets me sense the secrets of the universe and know passion beyond my wildest dreams.

However, my empathic abilities haven't always felt this incredible to me.

GROWING UP AS AN EMPATH

Like many empathic children, I never fit in. In fact, I felt like an alien on earth

waiting to be transported to my real home in the stars. I remember sitting in my

front yard looking up at the universe and hoping that a spaceship would take me

home. I was an only child, so I spent a lot of time by myself. I had no one to relate to who could understand my sensitivities. No one seemed to be like me.

My parents, who were both physicians—I come from a family of twenty-five

physicians—said, “Sweetheart, toughen up and get a thicker skin,” which I

didn’t want or even know how to do. I couldn’t go to crowded malls or parties.

I’d walk in feeling fine and walk out exhausted, dizzy, anxious, or suffering from some ache or pain I didn’t have before.

What I didn’t know back then was that everyone has a subtle energy field surrounding their body, a subtle radiant light that penetrates and extends beyond

it a distance of inches or even feet. These fields communicate information such

as emotions and physical well-being or distress. When we are in crowded places,

the energy fields of others overlap with ours. I picked up all of these intense

sensations, but I had absolutely no idea what they were or how to interpret them.

I just felt anxious and tired in crowds. And most of all, I wanted to escape.

As a teenager in Los Angeles, I got heavily involved with drugs to block out

my sensitivities. (I'm not recommending this to you!) Then, with my

sensitivities numbed, I could cope. I was able to attend parties and hang out at shopping malls, just like my friends, and would feel fine. What a relief that was!

In my memoir, *Second Sight,* I wrote about how I turned to drugs to shut off my intuition and empathic abilities. But after a near-tragic car accident, during which I went over a 1,500-foot cliff in Topanga Canyon at three in the morning

in an Austin Mini Cooper, my parents were scared to death and sent me to a psychiatrist.

Naturally, I fought my psychiatrist the whole way. But, in fact, this angel in

human form was the first person to help me realize that to become whole I had to

embrace my sensitivities, not run from them. This was the start of my healing and self-acceptance as an empath. Since I was so frightened by my childhood empathic and intuitive experiences, part of my evolution as a physician and a woman has been to learn to embrace these abilities. They are precious and deserve to be nurtured and supported. That's why I specialize in helping empaths

in my psychiatric practice and workshops.

IF YOU FEEL AS IF YOU DON'T FIT INTO THIS WORLD, IT'S BECAUSE

YOU'RE HERE TO CREATE A BETTER ONE.

Author Unknown

Yes, we empaths *can* flourish! Empathy is the medicine the world needs.

THE EMPATH EXPERIENCE

Now let's explore in more detail the empath experience. See if you relate personally or have a loved one or colleague who qualifies as an empath.

First, what is the difference between ordinary empathy and being an empath?

Ordinary empathy means our heart goes out to another person when they are going through a difficult period. It also means that we can be happy for others during their times of joy. As an empath, however, we actually sense other people's emotions, energy, and physical symptoms in our bodies, without the usual filters that most people have. We can experience other people's sorrow and

also their joy. We are supersensitive to their tone of voice and body movements.

We can hear what they don't say in words but communicate nonverbally and through silence. Empaths feel things first, *then* think, which is the opposite of how most people function in our overintellectualized society. There is no

membrane that separates us from the world. This makes us very different from other people who have had their defenses up almost from the time they were born.

Empaths share some or all of the traits of what psychologist Elaine Aron calls Highly Sensitive People, or HSPs. These traits include a low threshold for

stimulation, the need for alone time, sensitivity to light, sound, and smell, plus an aversion to large groups. In addition, it takes highly sensitive people longer to wind down after a busy day because their system's ability to transition from high

stimulation to quiet and calm is slower. Empaths also share a highly sensitive person's love of nature and quiet environments.

Empaths, however, take the experience of the highly sensitive person further.

We can sense subtle energy, which is called *shakti* or *prana* in Eastern healing traditions, and we absorb this energy into our own bodies. Highly sensitive people don't typically do that. This capacity allows us to experience the energies

around us in extremely deep ways. Since everything is made of subtle energy, including emotions and physical sensations, we energetically internalize the feelings, pain, and various physical sensations of others. We often have trouble

distinguishing someone else's discomfort from our own. Also, some empaths

have profound spiritual and intuitive experiences, which aren't usually

associated with highly sensitive people. Some empaths are even able to

communicate with animals, nature, and their inner guides. But being a highly sensitive person and an empath are not mutually exclusive: you can be both at the same time.

To determine if you are an empath, see if you relate to one or more of these

types.

GENERAL TYPES OF EMPATHS

Physical Empaths. You are especially attuned to other people's physical symptoms and tend to absorb them into your body. You also can become

energized by someone's sense of well-being.

Emotional Empaths. You mainly pick up other people's emotions and can

become a sponge for their feelings, both happy and sad.

Intuitive Empaths. You experience extraordinary perceptions such as heightened intuition, telepathy, messages in dreams, animal and plant communication, as well as contact with the Other Side. The following includes the different types and how they function:

• **Telepathic Empaths** receive intuitive information about others in present time.

• **Precognitive Empaths** have premonitions about the future while awake or dreaming.

• **Dream Empaths** are avid dreamers and can receive intuitive information from dreams that helps others and guides them in their own lives.

• **Mediumship Empaths** can access spirits on the Other Side.

• **Plant Empaths** can feel the needs of plants and connect with their essence.

• **Earth Empaths** are attuned to changes in our planet, our solar system, and the weather.

• **Animal Empaths** can tune in to animals and communicate with them.

Empaths have diverse and beautifully nuanced sensitivities. You may be one or

more of the above types. In future chapters, I'll also discuss specific kinds of physical and emotional empaths, such as food empaths (who are attuned to the energy of foods) and relationship and sexual empaths (who are attuned to their

partners' and friends' moods, sensuality, and physical health). As you learn to identify your special talents, you will find they can not only enrich your life but

also be used for the good of others.

STYLES OF RELATING: INTROVERTED AND

EXTROVERTED EMPATHS

Physical, emotional, and intuitive empaths can have different styles of

socializing and interacting with the world. Most empaths are introverted, though

some are extroverted. Other empaths are a combination of both. Introverted empaths, like me, have a minimal tolerance for socializing and small talk. They

tend to be quieter at gatherings and prefer leaving early. Often they arrive in their own cars so they don't have to feel trapped or dependent on others for a ride.

MANY EMPATHS DON'T LIKE SMALL TALK. IT EXHAUSTS THEM.

Judith Orloff, MD

I love my close circle of friends and mostly stay away from big parties or gatherings. I also don't like small talk, and I've never learned to do it, which is

common for the introverted type. I can socialize in groups for usually two to three hours before I feel overstimulated. My friends all know this about me and

don’t take it personally when I excuse myself early.

In contrast, extroverted empaths are more verbal and interactive when

socializing and enjoy the banter with others more than introverted empaths do.

They also can stay longer in social situations without getting exhausted or overstimulated.

HOW DOES SOMEONE BECOME AN EMPATH?

Many factors can contribute. Some babies enter the world with more sensitivity

than others—an inborn temperament. You can actually *see* it when they come out of the womb. They’re much more responsive to light, smells, touch,

movement, temperature, and sound. Also, from what I’ve observed with my

patients and workshop participants, some sensitivity may be genetically

transmitted. Highly sensitive children can come from mothers and fathers with the same traits. In addition, parenting plays a role. Childhood neglect or abuse can also affect sensitivity levels for adults. A portion of empaths I’ve treated have experienced early trauma, such as emotional or physical abuse, or were

raised by alcoholic, depressed, or narcissistic parents. This could potentially wear down the usual healthy defenses that a child with nurturing parents

develops. As a result of their upbringing, these children typically don’t feel

“seen” by their families, and they also feel invisible in the greater world that doesn’t value sensitivity. In all cases, however, empaths haven’t learned to defend against stress in the same way others have. We’re different in this respect. A noxious stimulus, such as an angry person, crowds, noise, or

bright light, can agitate us because our threshold for sensory overload is extremely low.

THE SCIENCE OF EMPATHY

There are a number of scientific findings explaining the empath experience that I

find fascinating.

The Mirror Neuron System

Researchers have discovered a specialized group of brain cells that are

responsible for compassion. These cells enable everyone to mirror emotions, to

share another person's pain, fear, or joy. Because empaths are thought to have hyperresponsive mirror neurons, we deeply resonate with other people's

feelings. How does this occur? Mirror neurons are triggered by outside events.

For example, when our spouse gets hurt, we feel hurt too. When our child is crying, we feel sad as well, and when our friend is happy, we also feel happy. In

contrast, psychopaths, sociopaths, and narcissists are thought to have what science calls "empathy deficient disorders" (see chapter 5). This means they lack the ability to feel empathy the way other people do, which may be caused by an

underactive mirror neuron system. We must beware of these people because they

are incapable of unconditional love. 2

Electromagnetic Fields

The second finding is based on the fact that both the brain and the heart generate

electromagnetic fields. According to the HeartMath Institute, these fields

transmit information about people's thoughts and emotions. Empaths may be

particularly sensitive to this input and tend to become overwhelmed by it.

Similarly, we often have stronger physical and emotional responses to changes in the electromagnetic fields of the earth and the sun. Empaths know well that what happens to the earth and the sun affects our state of mind and energy. 3

Emotional Contagion

The third finding that enhances our understanding of empaths is the phenomenon

of emotional contagion. Research has shown that many people pick up the

emotions of those around them. For instance, one crying infant will set off a wave of crying babies in a hospital ward. Or one person loudly expressing anxiety in the workplace can spread it to other workers. People commonly catch

other people's feelings in groups. A recent article in the *New York Times* stated that this ability to synchronize moods with others is crucial for good

relationships. What is the lesson for empaths? To choose positive people in our

lives so that we're not brought down by negativity. And when a friend is going

through a hard time, we need to take special precautions to ground and center ourselves. These are important strategies that you will learn in this book. 4

Increased Dopamine Sensitivity

The fourth finding involves dopamine, a neurotransmitter that increases the activity of neurons and is associated with the pleasure response. Research has shown that introverted empaths tend to have a higher sensitivity to dopamine than extroverts. Basically, introverted empaths need less dopamine to feel happy.

That could explain why they are more content with alone time, reading, and meditation and need less external stimulation from parties and other large social

gatherings. In contrast, extroverts crave the dopamine rush they get from lively

events. In fact, they often can't get enough of it. 5

Synesthesia

The fifth finding, which I find particularly compelling, is the extraordinary state

called "mirror-touch synesthesia." Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which two different senses are paired in the brain—for instance, seeing colors when you hear a piece of music or tasting words. Famous synesthetics include Isaac Newton, Billy Joel, and Itzhak Perlman. However, with mirror-touch

synesthesia, people actually feel the emotions and sensations of others in their own bodies, as if these emotions were their own. This is a wonderful

neurological explanation of an empath's experience.6

WHAT AREAS OF LIFE DOES EMPATHY AFFECT?

Empathy can be present in the following areas of daily life:

• **Health.** Many of the empaths who come to me as patients and in my

workshops feel overwhelmed, fatigued, and downright exhausted before they learn practical skills to help them cope with their sensitivities. They have often been diagnosed with agoraphobia, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, migraines, chronic pain, allergies, and adrenal fatigue (a form of burnout). On an emotional level, they may experience anxiety, depression, or panic attacks. We will discuss all of these topics in chapter 2.

• **Addictions.** Some empaths become addicted to alcohol, drugs, food, sex, shopping, or other behaviors in an attempt to numb their sensitivities. Overeating is common since some empaths unwittingly use food to ground themselves. Empaths can easily become overweight because the extra padding provides protection from negative energy. In chapter 3, we'll look at healthier coping mechanisms.

• **Relationships, Love, and Sex.** Empaths may unknowingly get involved with toxic partners and become anxious, depressed, or ill. They give their hearts too easily to narcissists and other unavailable people. Empaths are loving and expect others to be that way, which doesn't always happen. They also absorb their partner's stress and emotions, such as anger or depression, simply by interacting with

them, as well as during lovemaking—a particularly vulnerable time. In chapters 4 and 5, you'll learn how to have a healthy relationship without getting overloaded, as well as ways to set clear boundaries with toxic people in your life.

• **Parenting.** Empathic parents often feel especially overwhelmed and exhausted from the intense demands of child-rearing because they tend to absorb their children's feelings and pain. In chapter 6, empaths who are parents will learn skills to prevent them from doing this. In addition, empathic children can feel overwhelmed by their sensitivities. Their parents need a special education in helping these children to nurture their gifts and to thrive.

• **Work.** Empaths can feel drained by energy vampires in their workplace yet be at a loss to know how to set boundaries to protect themselves. In chapter 7, empaths will learn to center and replenish themselves in a work environment that may be excessively stimulating or have little privacy.

• **Extraordinary Perceptual Abilities.** Empaths have high sensitivities that can make them more intuitive, able to sense people's energy, and open to premonitions, animal communication, and powerful dreams. In chapter 8, we'll look at how they can become empowered by these abilities in a grounded way.

SELF-ASSESSMENT Are You an Empath?

To find out, take the following empath self-assessment, answering “mostly yes”

or “mostly no” to each question.

• Have I ever been labeled overly sensitive, shy, or introverted?

• Do I frequently get overwhelmed or anxious?

• Do arguments and yelling make me ill?

• Do I often feel like I don’t fit in?

• Do crowds drain me, and do I need alone time to revive myself?

• Do noise, odors, or nonstop talkers overwhelm me?

• Do I have chemical sensitivities or a low tolerance for scratchy

clothes?

• Do I prefer taking my own car to places so that I can leave early if I

need to?

• Do I overeat to cope with stress?

• Am I afraid of becoming suffocated by intimate relationships?

• Do I startle easily?

• Do I react strongly to caffeine or medications?

• Do I have a low threshold for pain?

• Do I tend to socially isolate?

• Do I absorb other people’s stress, emotions, or symptoms?

• Am I overwhelmed by multitasking, and do I prefer to do one thing at

a time?

• Do I replenish myself in nature?

• Do I need a long time to recuperate after being with difficult people or energy vampires?

• Do I feel better in small cities or the country rather than large cities?

• Do I prefer one-to-one interactions and small groups to large gatherings?

Now calculate your results.

• If you answered yes to one to five questions, you're at least a partial empath.

• If you answered yes to six to ten questions, you have moderate empath tendencies.

• If you answered yes to eleven to fifteen questions, you have strong empath tendencies.

• If you answered yes to more than fifteen questions, you are a full-blown empath.

Determining to what degree you are an empath will clarify your needs and the strategies you must learn to meet them. This is essential to gain a comfort zone

in your life.

ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF BEING AN EMPATH

Being an empath brings both advantages and challenges.

Common Advantages

I cherish being an empath. I'm grateful for the blessings my sensitivities bestow on me each day. I love being intuitive, feeling the flow of energy in the world,

reading people, and experiencing the richness of being so open to life and nature.

We empaths have many marvelous traits. We have huge hearts and the

instinct to help others in need or who are less fortunate. We're dreamers and idealists. We're also passionate, deep, creative, in touch with our emotions, compassionate, and can see the big picture. We can appreciate another's feelings

and become loyal friends and mates. We're intuitive, spiritual, and can sense energy. We have a special appreciation for the natural world and feel at home there. We resonate with nature, its plants, forests, and gardens, and we often love

water. Whether we are soaking in the womb-like, warm water of a bath or living

by an ocean or a river, water energizes us. In addition, we may feel a strong intuitive bond with our animal companions. We often talk to them like they are

humans, and we may become involved with animal rescue or animal

communication.

Common Challenges

Once you begin to deal with the challenges of being an empath and gain more coping skills, you will *really* enjoy all the advantages. The common

challenges I've known and seen with my patients and workshop participants include the following:

• **Becoming overstimulated.** Since you don't possess the same defenses as others, you may often feel like you have raw nerve endings and burn out easily. Without enough alone time to replenish yourself and wind down each day, you will suffer from the toxic effects of overstimulation and sensory overload.

• **Absorbing the stress and negativity of others.** Sometimes you can't tell if an emotion or sense of bodily discomfort is your own or someone else's. Taking on other people's distress can lead to a variety of physical and emotional symptoms in you, from pain to anxiety.

• **Feeling things intensely.** You may be unable to watch violent or upsetting movies about people or animals because the brutality hurts too much. You may carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, feeling the pain of others in your life or those you witness suffering in the news.

• **Experiencing emotional and social hangovers.** When you're around too many people or intense emotions, the malaise of sensory overload can linger long after the event.

• **Feeling isolated and lonely.** You may isolate yourself or keep yourself distant from people because the world seems so

overwhelming. As a result, others may view you as standoffish. Like many empaths, you may be hypervigilant at scanning your environment to ensure it's safe, which others can perceive as a signal to stay away. You may also freeze around inauthentic people, which can convey aloofness—but this is clearly a protective device. Some empaths prefer socializing online to keep others at a distance, so there's less of the tendency to absorb their discomfort and stress.

• **Experiencing emotional burnout.** A downside of being so compassionate is that people flock to you to tell you their life stories. Ever since I was a child, it was as if I wore a sign saying, "I can help you." This is why empaths must set clear boundaries with others and not "overgive."

• **Coping with increased sensitivity to light, smell, taste, touch, temperature, and sound.** For many empaths, and myself, loud noises and bright lights are painful. They penetrate and shock our bodies. I hold my ears when an ambulance goes by. Hearing leaf blowers and loud machinery is jarring. I also can't tolerate the explosive blasts of fireworks. They startle me, and I react like a frightened dog reacts. Empaths have an enhanced startle response because we are super-responsive to intense sensory input. Strong smells and chemicals, such

as exhaust and perfumes, make us feel queasy, allergic, or suffocated. We're also sensitive to temperature extremes and may dislike air-conditioning. Our bodies can be energized or depleted by intense weather, such as a thunderstorm, gusty winds, or a snowfall. Many empaths are energized by a bright full moon, while others are agitated by it.

• **Expressing needs in intimate relationships.** Empaths have specific needs when living in the same space or sharing a bed with someone. Many require a separate space and sometimes a separate bed to feel comfortable. It's important for empaths to have conversations with their partners about their specific needs.

Special Challenges for Each Gender

An empath's sensitivities can be challenging in different ways for men and women, though of course there is much overlap.

For instance, male empaths are often ashamed of their sensitivities and reluctant to talk about them. They may feel they're not "masculine enough." They have had to fight gender stereotypes and were probably warned not to be a "crybaby" and to "act like a man." Boys are taught that "strong men don't cry," and sensitive boys can be bullied at school for being "sissies." Male empaths may not be attracted to football, soccer, or aggressive contact

sports, and so they

may be excluded and shamed by the other boys. Consequently, male empaths

may repress their emotions and eventually even forget they have them. For all these reasons, they often suffer in silence, which can negatively impact their relationships, careers, and health. Highly sensitive men who are famous include

Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, and Jim Carrey.

I find sensitive men incredibly attractive. I love Alanis Morissette's song "In

Praise of the Vulnerable Man." To become well balanced, men must own their

sensitive sides. I'm not talking about overly feminized men who have not

learned to embody the masculine but rather balanced men who are strong enough

to be sensitive and secure enough to be vulnerable. Such men have a high emotional IQ. They are not afraid of emotions, their own or another's. This makes them compassionate and attractive partners, friends, and leaders.

In contrast, female empaths in Western culture are given more permission to

express their emotions and "female intuition," though by no means does our world embrace feminine power. Throughout much of history, the feminine has been squashed. Think of the Inquisition during the Dark Ages or the Salem witch

trials, where sensitives were burned at the stake. When I first started speaking about intuition to groups, I was afraid I would be harmed. But once I realized I

was tuning in to the collective energy of women seers who had been suppressed

over the ages, I discovered that today is a different time. It is much safer to express my voice now, so my discomfort has lifted.

Similarly, many of my female patients have been reluctant to authentically express their sensitivities for fear of being misunderstood, judged, or abandoned.

It's important that we learn to be authentic in relationships about our empathic needs. Also, for some women empaths, empathy can turn into codependency.

They have such big hearts that they get caught up in caretaking roles, attending

to others more than they attend to themselves. A female empath who is balanced

knows how to set boundaries with her time and energy. She learns to give and receive in a balanced way, a powerful combination. Female empaths who are famous include Nicole Kidman, Jewel (her song "Sensitive" is about empaths),

Winona Ryder, Alanis Morissette, and Princess Diana.

EMPATHS ARE NOT "OVERLY SENSITIVE." THEY HAVE A GIFT BUT

MUST LEARN TO MANAGE THEIR SENSITIVITIES.

Judith Orloff, MD

THRIVING AS AN EMPATH: SKILLS TO PREVENT

OVERLOAD

Throughout this book, I'll be sharing skills to help empaths manage the

challenges and enhance the many advantages of their abilities. Although society

may say empaths are “too sensitive” and suggest that we “toughen up,” I

encourage empaths to develop their sensitivities even more, while staying

centered with them. Being an empath is a huge asset when you learn to manage

it. Empaths are not crazy, neurotic, weak, or hypochondriacs. They are

wonderful, sensitive people with a gift, but all of us need tools to cope.

A skill that sensitive people must learn is how to deal with sensory overload

when too much is coming at them too quickly. This can leave them exhausted,

anxious, depressed, or sick. Like many of us, you may feel there is no on/off switch for your empathy. This is *not* true. I’ll show you how to take charge of your sensitivities rather than feeling victimized by them. When you feel

protected and safe, the world will become your playground.

To gain a sense of safety, recognize some of the common factors that

contribute to empathy overload. Once you begin to identify your triggers, you can quickly act to remedy a situation.

What makes an empath’s overload symptoms worse? Fatigue, illness,

rushing, traffic, crowds, loud environments, toxic people, low blood sugar, arguing, overwork, chemical sensitivities, too much socializing, and feeling trapped in overstimulating situations such as parties and cruises. Any

combination of these conditions intensifies an empath’s overload. Therefore, keep the following in mind: stress + low blood sugar = drama

and exhaustion.

What makes an empath's overload symptoms better? When I experience

sensory overload, I need to slow everything down and unplug from all

stimulation. If it gets really intense, I feel like a flower that's wilting, and that's when I need sustenance from stillness. I often retreat to a room without sound or

bright light, and I sleep or meditate to recalibrate myself at a lower level of stimulation. Sometimes solitude for an entire day or a weekend is necessary if my sensory overload is extreme. Still, during such times, I may take short walks

out in nature and limit my trips out to take care of errands. The problem is that

empaths often see things as "all or nothing." Either we're on the go or retreating

to the safe haven of home. I suggest that you moderate this radical stance so that

you can find balance and not suffer from undue isolation or loneliness. Listen to

your intuition about what is right for you. Each of us has to find our own way in

honoring our needs.

To deal with overload, a patient told me, "Only one-to-one contact with

people is bearable. Groups just feel too intense." Yet another patient explained to

me, "I decompress at night when everyone is sleeping and the whole world is resting. The invisible energetic buzz of the day quiets down, and I can

relax and

focus.”

In addition, shielding is a basic skill I recommend to prevent empathic

overload. Shielding is a quick way to protect yourself. Many empaths rely on it

to block out toxic energy while still allowing for the free flow of positive energies. I suggest you regularly use this skill. The minute you’re uncomfortable

with a person, place, or situation, put up your shield. Use it in an airport, at a party if you’re talking to an energy vampire, or in a packed doctor’s waiting room. Shielding puts you in a safe bubble where you won’t be drained.

PROTECTION STRATEGY

Shielding Visualization for Empaths

Allow at least five minutes for this exercise. Find a quiet and protected space. Make sure that you won’t be interrupted. Loosen your clothing

and find a position that’s comfortable, perhaps sitting cross-legged on the

floor or upright on a chair. Begin by taking a few deep, long breaths.

Breathe in, really feeling the inhalation, and then exhale, really letting out a big exhalation. Feel the sensuality of the breath, the connection to

prana, the sacred life force.

Let all thoughts drift by like clouds in the sky, returning to your

breath over and over again to find your center. Feel a core of energy

running from your toes, throughout your body, and up through the top of your head. Focusing on this will keep you centered.

In this relaxed state, visualize a beautiful shield of white or pink light surrounding your body completely and extending a few inches beyond it. This shield protects you from anything negative, stressful, toxic, or intrusive. Within the protection of the shield, feel yourself centered, happy, and energized. This shield blocks out negativity, though at the same time, you can still feel what is positive and loving. Get used to the sensation of the shield protecting your body. You can visualize the shield whenever you suspect you're absorbing someone else's energy.

To close, inwardly say "thank you" for this protection. Take a long, deep breath in and out, and then slowly open your eyes. Come back to the room. Be in your body 100 percent.

Along with shielding, daily self-care for empaths involves eating well and minimizing stress. In addition, certain actions are a balm for both body and soul.

These include taking quiet alone time, associating with positive people, being in

nature, immersing yourself in water to clear negative energy, meditating,

exercising, and defining limits with energy vampires. Empaths need to regularly