

Grit 'n' Grace: Good Girls Breaking Bad Rules

Episode #107: How to Survive the Sights and Sounds of the 4th of July

Cheri: Hey. This is Cheri Gregory, and you're listening to Grit 'n' Grace. Good girls breaking bad rules. The podcast that equips you to lose who you're not, love who you are, and live your one life well. This is a little minisode, for the listener who's a highly sensitive person, or who loves someone who is an HSP. And we're releasing this right before Independence Day, because the Fourth of July can be totally overwhelming for us HSPs.

Our goal here is to give you some practical strategies so you can take intentional care of yourself or your loved one, and really enjoy the holiday.

Amy: You have said, Cheri Gregory, that I'm an honorary HSP because I straddle ... I'm right on that boundary line. But, my son Nolan, my youngest son, we took the test over Christmas together. He is an extreme HSP. And Fourth of July was very fraught for us as a family until Nolan turned probably eight or nine. I remember one year our whole family, extended family ... my brother has six children, so you can ... I mean, we're talking masses of people. We pack into vans and cars. We go to downtown Morehead City. We park miles away. We walk ... we're in the throng, and the fireworks start.

And Nolan, my ... I think he was three at that time, freaked completely out.

Cheri: Oh, poor baby.

Amy: Screaming in terror, melting down, and here we are, in the throng miles away from the car. Can you feel my pain, Cheri?

Cheri: Oh, I can feel your ... I can feel his pain.

Amy: That was awful for everybody.

Cheri: Because the 5th of July is actually my favorite day of the year because it means that once again, I have survived what, for many highly sensitive people, is basically HSP purgatory because there are so many things that we cram into this one day, and any one of those things might be manageable but you pack them all into a single day. And it can just be completely overwhelming.

Amy: I get that.

Cheri: And so, let's actually talk through this from two perspectives. So, what we're looking at today is how to survive the sights and sounds of the Fourth of July, and we're picking the Fourth of July as perhaps the most overwhelming sensory experience, at least in America, for a highly sensitive person. But this could apply to any day that's gonna be really packed and potentially overwhelming. So, let's walk through it from the perspective that I'm the highly sensitive person, the classic, the no test required. And you're the mom of an HSP, so some of this we can kind of look at it as advice for ourselves or advice for people that we know and love.

Amy: Terrific. So, one of the tools that you talk a lot about for HSPs is a comfort kit. What does a Fourth of July comfort kit look like, Cheri?

Cheri: Okay, well I'm gonna walk through this, and we'll put the list in the show notes for this episode. But the first thing I wanna say is very few items on this list are specific to light and sound sensitivity. But here's the thing. Everything on this list has to do with comfort, and by making sure that we are taking care of all of our needs and we are mostly as comfortable as we can make ourselves, it means we'll be less reactive when the bright lights start and when all of those sounds.

Conversely, if we're not taking care of our needs ... if our feet are cold, if we're hungry, if we're somewhat dehydrated, a person who's not an HSP is a little better equipped to kinda suck it up and make it through to the next day. Whereas the HSP is gonna feel very depleted. And so, self care, and taking care of comfort here isn't about being cushy, it's about strength. The root word of comfort is fort, which means strength. And so, this is predeciding, packing this HSP comfort kit, is predeciding to make sure that we can be as strong as we possibly can. Or if you're packing this for somebody else to make sure they can be as strong as they possibly can.

Amy: I am looking at the list, and it's an amazing list, and especially mothers of children that are HSP, you're gonna want that list for them. And then HSPs, you're gonna want that list for yourselves. So, go visit the website for that. And then you talk about this practice of predeciding. So, you talked about step one is predeciding to take your kit with you, and then what else can we predecide to help with the Fourth of July?

Cheri: Predeciding how much we can take, and then adjusting it as we need to. I wrote a blog post not too long ago about the fact that sometimes HSPs will make a plan because they think they know what they're gonna need ahead of time, and then they need to be able to adjust it when the time actually comes. Again, because we pack so much into a Fourth of July ... I mean, there's people ... you already mentioned the crowds, and you might have a lot of your own people, and individually, you may love your peeps, but when they come in dozens, that can be hard.

And then there's places. Sometimes we go to the beach, and there's water and there's sand, and the water that dries on your skin is sticky. And so for those

who are a little bit more tactile defensive, that can be a problem. Maybe you don't go to a beach. Maybe you go to a park. And so there's dirt, and there's sun and there's ants and there's mosquitoes. And then, you already mentioned, traffic and parking can be a headache, and some family members can roll with that. Some members are going to drive around until they find the perfect parking space. And so that has its whole emotional component.

And then, sometimes you're going to an event. So, maybe it's a parade, which has air horns. Or maybe it's a sporting event, which has lots of people and lots of screaming and shouting. You might go to a concert, which of course has loud music and has the percussion. You might go to all three on the same day. Or maybe your family's planning to go to all three on the same day.

And all I'm saying here, you're not even a full-blown HSP and you're looking overwhelmed. Then throw in there some BBQ and you've got all the smell of the food going on, and all the textures. And all of that is before the fireworks ever start.

And so, all I'm suggesting with the predeciding is ... none of those are bad. Individually, each one of those might be wonderful. But piling one on top of each other may be too much for some people. And so, all I'm suggesting is have a strategy and predecide what's the one or two things that are most important? Know what they are and why. Is it eating the family BBQ together? Is it the fireworks? Give yourself the permission because nobody else is gonna do it, whether you're an introvert or a highly sensitive person, or maybe you're just going through a sensitive time in life right now. Some people kind of slip into being sensitive because of a life circumstance, such as an illness or grief.

Predecide, have the conversation with yourself. Don't look to people outside of you to notice or to give you permission. You get to decide that for yourself.

Amy: Oh, that's so good. So empowering. And then, during the course of the day ... so these are the things that we do in preparation but during the course of the day, what kinds of things should HSPs do?

Cheri: Well, I'm gonna suggest setting a phone alarm maybe every hour, maybe every other hour to just have a check-in, and ask yourself, "How am I doing? How am I doing physically? Emotionally? Relationally? How's my energy level?" And certainly process through all of those. Physically, if you're thirsty, get a drink, you know. If you're upset with somebody, maybe you can do the square breathing that you've taught me, and you can let go of that and go back to focusing on the relationship rather than on your frustration. But check-in. This is so important for HSPs who tend to be very reflective and very perceptive.

The second thing is, if nothing changes at all, then how much longer can I keep doing what I'm doing? And a lot of times, I'm like, "Oh, it's not my favorite. I'm not doing great, but I think I could go two or three more hours." And that's

helpful to realize for myself. Or, "Oh my goodness. I'm five minutes away from a complete meltdown." Well, in that case, it's time again for me to do something about it.

And then the third question to ask, "What one change could I make that would increase my endurance?" And again, that goes back to generally to self care. Is it that I need to guzzle an entire bottle of water because I have let myself get dehydrated? Do I need to go take a walk by myself, and then come back to the people I love? There's often things that we can do that make us more resilient in the situation that we're in.

Amy: I just love that all of them are things that you do for yourself or if you're taking care of a child, you watch them for these things. And so, then you say plan your exit strategy. This sounds key to me.

Cheri: You know, if there's anything that really adds the overwhelm, it's the sense that we have no options. And so, if the family has a second car, take the second car. Don't ask permission. Don't explain. If your aunt so and so from out of town thinks it's weird, don't worry about it. Take the second car so that you have the option of getting in that car and doing whatever you need. Even if it's just driving around in the air conditioning. Even if you lose the perfect parking spot, you have permission to hop in that car and have a few minutes alone and cool off so that you can go back and rejoin. Or, you might need to hop in the car and go home. That's also perfectly acceptable.

And if you don't have a second car, then having the Uber or the Lyft app already on your phone with the credit card in there, so if you need to be picked up and taken somewhere, again, it's a way of setting a boundary for yourself and practicing self care. By all means, have conversations ahead of time with the people you're close to so they know that's a possibility and so that when you leave, you haven't made a scene, nobody thinks you're mad, you've just done what's best for you.

And then if leaving isn't an option, which happens on days like this when you're with family, then at least seek sanctuary. Predecide a getaway spot. If you're at a house, you might be able to get to a backroom. If nothing else, many HSPs hide in the bathroom. We lock ourselves into a public restroom stall, we pull out feet up so nobody can see that we're there, and we just take five minutes. And I know that's rude. I know if people are banging on the door, we need to let them get into the stall. But sometimes, you just need a few minutes away from everybody to collect yourself and that's normal for an HSP. That's okay.

Amy: And so, if all this preparation, all the strategies that we can use during the day fail, what then?

Cheri: You know, on a day like the Fourth of July, most HSPs are able to embrace some element of the overwhelm. I mean, all of us have something we do at high

speed or high volume. Mine is sometimes I will listen to my favorite praise and worship music really high volume for about 90 minutes at a time. It's when I'm trying to concentrate on a task. Now, most of the time, I'm listening to quiet hymns played by a piano, but every once in a while, I go full out and I just blast the praise and worship music. So, if you can think of the Fourth of July as a day to just choose the intentional overwhelm, and to really embrace it, I actually have really fond memories of the fireworks when I was a kid. I wasn't real fond of the noise. I wasn't real fond of the brightness. But, something about that whole experience really turned out to be very magical, and realizing it's just for a short period of time and then it'll be over and it only comes around once a year, it makes it so that we have kind of a time target.

I don't feel so guilty about the fact that I do get drained and I kind of fade throughout the day of Fourth of July. But for the fireworks, I come alive and I really, really enjoy that. Each of us have something ... it might be the family; it might be the food; it might be the parade. For me, it's the fireworks that make Fourth of July totally worth it.

Amy: Now, for me, my full blown HSP comes out the day after an event. So, what do we do the day after, Cheri?

Cheri: This is when we just need to practice extra self care. You know, most people, especially the extroverts among us, they are energized, they had a great time, and they are ready to just hit the ground running the next day. Some of us may need to take that whole day off, or at the very least, we just need to be intentionally aware that we're gonna be a little more tired, we're gonna be a little bit more depleted. We need to practice extra self care. And, just knowing that and taking those steps for ourselves can go a long ways to not feeling so defective.

I spent years wondering what was wrong with me. Like, why do I always get sick the day after a big event? Well, I wasn't sick. I was just drained. Now that I know it's gonna happen, you would think maybe, "Oh, well she's gonna be a self fulfilling prophecy." No, actually, I do better than I used to because I know to expect it, I know how to take better care of myself ahead of time, and then I know what to do the day after so that the effects aren't as hard on me and definitely aren't as hard on those around me.

Head on over to gritngracegirls.com/episode107B as in boy. There you'll find the transcript of this show, along with my HSP comfort kit list that you can download and customize. Be sure to join us this weekend when Amy and I will be back with our regularly scheduled episode, processing what we learned from Sharon Hodde Miller, and her book, *Free of Me*.

For today, grow your grit. Embrace God's grace. When you run across a bad rule, you know what to do. Go right on ahead and break it.