

# SURVIVING LIFE DRAMAS

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Transcript

Part 4 of 12

Surviving Indifference



changing minds, changing lives



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**Surviving Life Dramas: Surviving Indifference.  
Part 4 of 12**

**Dr. Mike Gosling:**

Hello, I'm Doctor Mike Gosling. On behalf of Karen Gosling and Gosling International and the Emotional Wealth Academy, I'd like to welcome you to this seminar. The seminar is about Surviving Indifference and it's one of the seminars in the seminar series Surviving Life Dramas. Have you ever been a house-mate? Have you been in a relationship with your partner, wife or spouse? But you're not actually in a loving relationship? You just exist and function as two people, looking after the children? If that's the case, you could well be house-mates.

Karen Gosling is an expert speaker on this topic, having spent many years helping people to manage these situations. Please welcome Mrs Karen Gosling.

**Karen Gosling:**

This afternoon we're going to be talking through about the House-Mate Syndrome, which is an extension of being a HSP. All HSPs will understand the House-Mate Syndrome. What does this describe? Well, I've given this term to coin a situation where people are living together – when two people are living together – and they have, over time become disconnected and are no longer intimate, emotionally.

When people start to live together, there's usually great companionship, intimacy, lots of laughter, lots of talking, lots of fun, lots of sharing. But after a while, there might be a shift in

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the relationship and it shifts to one of just co-existing. Of no longer talking about or sharing about feelings and thoughts. Just safe topics. And this is what I have called the House-Mate Syndrome. It might be pleasant, it might be very civil, it might be courteous, but there is just some connectiveness that is missing.

Now, women are more likely to protest about this sort of relationship before a man will for a number of reasons. One is because, a woman, because of her female brain, is geared more towards connectiveness in relationship. And so, she is more likely to pick up some of those subtle feelings that something is wrong. A woman is also more likely to speak about her emotions more than a man will because she is more practised at it. Women do talk about emotions and relationships more than men will.

A third reason is that a woman's identity is formed around her relationship with her man and with the happiness of the little family unit, whereas a man's identity is more formed through his work and his ability to provide.

So, yes a woman will protest about this house-mate sort of relationship more than a man will. And she will say to her husband, or to her partner, "We have to talk." And then of course those words are the most dreaded words that a man is likely to want to hear: "WE HAVE TO TALK." A man won't want to seek outside help. A woman will talk to an outsider, a woman will talk to a girlfriend, to a parish priest, to a counsellor, because what she wants to do is to enhance the relationship and she wants to learn how to do that. She wants tips, she wants tools. She's a bit more open about the relationship.

But, if a man feels as though he needs to go to a counsellor, there are a number of reasons why he is reluctant to do that. One is because he feels like it is a private matter. "We should be able to fix this up on our own." What he really means is, "I should be able to fix this up on my own. Don't talk about our personal problems outside." If a husband realises that the wife thinks that there's a problem, it leaves him feeling inadequate, and leaves him feeling as though he is a failure.

It could also be that he doesn't actually know what's wrong, because very often a man thinks about the relationship and about his emotions as much as I think about a car engine - not very much at all. You see, I can look at a car engine, I can lift up the bonnet and identify that it's a car engine, but I don't know what the names of all the bits are, and I certainly don't know what they do. All I want to do really is close the bonnet and hope that the car works.

And for many men, the relationship is a bit like that. They don't know what the bits are, they don't know how they work, they don't know what to call them. And so they don't talk about a relationship because they don't know the words. And of course, if a person can't talk about something, then they're not going to think about them either, because we think in language. And so, if you're not thinking about emotions or relationship, you're not doing self-reflection. And so you're not really able to analyze within your own head, what's going on.

So this is what happens to a lot of people and that's why wives very often get frustrated with their men. Because the wives will be thinking about, and the HSPs will be thinking about the relationship. And the husbands will be thinking about the rugby scores, or the website.

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So, women feel relationship stress more and they are the ones who are more likely to say, "We need to talk." So if women are more prepared to talk and they don't like this feeling of disconnectedness, what is this House-Mate Syndrome that I have mentioned?

Well, House-Mate Syndrome starts off like this. Couple in a new relationship, connectedness, intimacy, easy, natural, fun, laughter, talking about anything. You remember how it was for you. You talk about anything and everything and you have a lot of energy. You talk all night. You don't feel judged. It's safe to say anything. Your partner wants to hear a lot about you. Your partner is asking questions and encouraging you to talk, to give opinions, to give ideas, to talk about your dreams. Very easy conversation at the beginning of a relationship.

But then, somewhere along the line, something like this happens. There might be a conversation, there's an irritated response. And the irritated response, the brain picks up as a threat, as an attack. Something's wrong. So, you get cautious and from that moment on, you're cautious about what you ask. You're careful about what you say just in case the other person doesn't like it. And then because you're not saying everything that's inside head and heart, you start to shut down a little bit.

Now, if you're an HSP, that shutting down means you will dwell and you will think about the relationship. And you might wait for a partner to say, "What's wrong with you?" But, if you have a non-HSP partner, that person won't notice – not for a while. Because, in the non-HSP's world silence means that everything's all right. Silence means that everything's fine. We speak about it if something is wrong.

And so, the HSP is likely to wait to be asked, "What's wrong? Is anything upsetting you?" But the days go by, nothing gets said, the dwelling occurs, the stress rises. Now eventually, the non-HSP must get wind of the fact that there's something going on here. There is some tension. The non-HSP starts to feel a bit shut out, a bit excluded and a bit ignored, and so might say something. At best, he might say, "Are you all right? Are you okay?" And at worst he might say, "Why are you sulking?" But by that time, the HSP partner might be feeling so wounded and so neglected and so hurt that she is likely to say, "Yes, everything's fine." And the poor old man has to identify how many different ways he can interpret that word, FINE. Because the HSP is now feeling wounded and wanting to have feelings restored.

If the HSP feels as though she or he – because a man can also be a HSP – can talk about what is troubling her without conflict, and talk about it in a normal voice where there is no escalation of argument, no problem. The matter will be talked about, it will be talked through, it will be resolved.

If the HSP starts to talk and there are more irritated responses, more frustration, dismissal of feelings, or a "don't be so silly" then immediately the HSP feels criticised, feels put down, all internal feelings, and shuts up. And the withdrawal occurs, and so more and more silence, more and more shutting down. And because it hasn't been resolved, there's more dwelling. As we've spoken about before, the more the HSP dwells, the more Adrenalin is produced and the more stress is created. The non-HSP partner may well be completely unaware of that.

Now, when the HSP feels, "I am wounded, I feel hurt, I need to be looked after," it can result in some very off comments. And so, the HSP has got some things to learn as well. Because the

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HSP is likely to give sarcastic answers. Short responses. Abrupt, snappy responses to a partner's question. Poor old partner's got no idea what is going on.

Many years ago – and I know I speak about Mike's and my relationship quite a lot, but it's safe to do that because many things have happened and many things have been resolved in our thirty years of marriage. But, I recall many, many years ago when Mike and I were living in Adelaide in Australia, we had a small farm in the Adelaide hills. And it was one weekend when we were just working together, just the two of us, putting up fences. And I was the one who had to line up the post and Mike was down at the other end. I would hold the post steady, he would come and use the crowbar and pound in the earth to put in a fence post.

On this one occasion after we had done this for the eighteenth time, he came up, he measured the fence again, the fence was crooked. Oh did he get mad. He was expressing himself and I felt very wounded. I did not appreciate being yelled at because I thought that I was doing my best. So, we went into silence, no wrong, I went into silence. I withdrew. Because I am an HSP with an Avoidant Style. Monday was silent. By Tuesday, I was saying, "do you want something to eat?" By Wednesday, I was saying, "Shall I pick you up after work?" Being civil, but not warm. Because, as an HSP, when I withdraw I go quiet and I wait and I wait for an apology.

So by Thursday, Mike said, "how come we're not talking? When are we going to start talking? What have I done wrong this time? Why are you sulking?" The great indignation, "Why are you sulking?"

And I said, "I'm not sulking. I'm wounded."

And he said, "What on earth are you wounded about?"

And I said, "When you yelled at me last Sunday."

And of course he didn't remember. So, with great, self-righteous indignation – remember HSPs have been dwelling on this now for days – I remembered every word, I remembered every tone. So, I repeated the incident and Mike listened to me patiently and said, "Oh that. I wasn't yelling at you."

I said, "What do you mean you weren't yelling at me? I was the only one there."

He said, "No no no. I was yelling at the fence post because the post was crooked."

And I said, "But I was the only one there. Of course you were yelling at me."

And he said, "No Karen. I wasn't yelling at you. I was the one that lined it up. If I was mad or angry at anybody, I was angry at myself. Whatever made you think I was yelling at you?"

But you see, in my world, I don't yell at inanimate objects. And so this was totally puzzling for me. And so I said, "Wow. All this time, I have been so hurt and so aroused" - I didn't use the word then, I just said 'upset' because I didn't understand about Adrenalin Arousal then. I said, "I feel so upset because I thought you were yelling at me."

And he said, "Believe me Karen. I wasn't yelling at you. But" – this is a life-changing sentence, "even if I had been yelling at you, how did that make you feel?"

I said, "Well thank you for asking, because when you yelled at me, I felt not valued, not respected, not loved. I felt like I was a nuisance, I felt like you didn't want to be anywhere near me, you didn't want my help. Possibly you didn't even want to be married to me."

And Mike was aghast and as he picked his jaw up off the ground he said, "You felt all of those things because I raised my voice?"

And I said, "Yes." Meaning, doesn't everybody?

And he said, "Goodness me no. I do love you. I do value you. I do respect you. I do want you to help me. I do want you to be around. You're not a nuisance. Whatever makes you think all those things that you think?"

And I said, "Because you yelled at me."

He said, "Oh my goodness. Absolutely not. I had no idea that this was how a raised voice made you feel. This is terrible. I don't want you to feel those things and I certainly don't want to be responsible. Now that I know that that's how you feel when I raise my voice, I'm going to try really hard not to raise my voice at you ever again."

Which of course, was a great relief to me being an HSP. And I said, "Thank you." And he said, "However, I've been yelling and raising my voice for a long time and I will probably make mistakes sometimes and I will probably still raise my voice. So my part of the bargain is that I will try not to raise my voice at you now I know the impact. But please can your part of the bargain be, that when it happens, can you please say to yourself, "This does not mean that he doesn't value me. This does not mean that he doesn't respect me. This does not mean that he doesn't love me." Because all of those things are true. That is your own thinking."

And it was on this conversation many, many years ago that it was the first time I realised that people didn't feel the same as me. It was the first time I realised that other people had different interpretations of interaction than I did. Because I thought that everyone was like me. And that was the occasion when I started to realise, this is the reason why people speak to me differently than I speak to them. They have a different interpretation and it's my own interpretation, it's my brain that makes me dwell on these things that are not in fact reality.

So that's a personal story and that was a real story and I'm pleased to say that twenty six years later, Mike and I are still married. But do I still have Adrenalin Arousal? Absolutely. Does Mike still raise his voice because he is a Reactive Person? Absolutely. Sometimes I raise my voice as well, but not often. Because normally, I either withdraw or become sarcastic. Sarcasm can be said to hurt back but in a normal tone. HSPs are good at that.

What happens in a relationship is that after the initial conflict, or the initial withdrawal, things start to settle down a bit. As long as there's no more conflict, time passes, a few days go by, things settle down. Go back to normal. The matter never gets talked about. None-the-less, the HSP still thinks about the incident in their mind, the non-HSP thinks it is completely finished because the event is over.

To non-HSPs, things come and go as events, for HSPs, everything is to do with the relationship. Remember, I said in the previous seminar, HSPs have feelings about everything. So, things settle down and the couple starts talking about safe topics. About the things that aren't going to create conflict. They discuss the children and they discuss the weather, and they discuss their parents coming for dinner, and they discuss the dinner party that they're going to have.

But what is happening is that there is a decline in emotional intimacy. So, they're no longer talking about what is in head and heart, because there is fear associated with it. Now, when there is a decline in emotional intimacy, there's very often an associated decline in sexual intimacy as well. Because in order for couples to be sexually intimate, they must feel very safe

with one another. You're not going to have an intimacy with somebody that you don't feel safe with. You don't make love with your enemy.

**Questioner:**

I identify with so much of what you're saying, but for some, I mean speaking personally, you can go even a step further where going back to if you learn early enough that you're sensitive very early on and you learn not to feel in feelings – even though you have them about everything – it's unsafe to talk about them. And then you take that into your marriage, then everything's unsafe, and so in my experience, shutting down means not even dwelling. Not even thinking about it. You're dead. Refusing to dwell, because that feeling is apparently not allowed.

Even having the feeling of shock or dismay or disappointment or fear. Well fear – feeling very aware of it – is not allowed because if you bring it up it's just worse. It's worse, so if you're dead to it, you can do anything.

**Karen Gosling:**

If you're dead to it, you can function. And that's what happens. People either get to a point of blocking because they have to in order to function. Or, a person can choose to block. And some people actually say, "I am not going to hurt any more, either because I need to function or because this doesn't make sense to me."

**Questioner:**

But is that conscious?

**Karen Gosling:**

Sometimes. Sometimes it's conscious.

**Questioner:**

So having said a decline in emotional intimacy, seems very natural to lead to a decline in sexual intimacy, doesn't necessarily lead to a decline in sex. It just means a decline in sexual intimacy, I think.

**Karen Gosling:**

Yes, and sometimes people can still be involved with the act of sex because they themselves don't fully understand why they feel distant. And their intellect is saying, "Of course I still love him and of course he still loves me. I mean how ridiculous." So, therefore this should happen BUT the feeling of disconnect is there. And if a partner is an HSP, he or she will pick up that disconnect. But a non-HSP partner won't even notice the disconnect and this again becomes a very complicated but integral part of the House-Mate Relationship.

**Questioner:**

Because sometimes the non-HSP doesn't even know what it feels like to be connected in the first place.

**Karen Gosling:**

That can be. But also the non-HSP can absolutely love their partner. And have no idea that the HSP partner is suffering.

If in fact there is a disconnect in sexual intimacy, because one knows it and the other one respects it, it still doesn't necessarily make sense to either. It is often a reason why people seek counselling because there has been a decline in sexual and emotional intimacy and neither one is understanding. And the relationship issues and this manifestation of distancing can often be explained. I have many people having an Aha moment, because this exchange is what I talk about in the session. And I have had many men, many husbands who are HSPs. Who will find out about House-Mate Syndrome and go, "Ah. At last, this makes sense to me. Is this why I don't feel connected to her anymore?"

Because it's very easy to think that HSPs are mainly women. Not so. It's just that women tend to talk about their emotions more and the HSP man is often confused but doesn't necessarily think about his confusion. He just feels the disconnect, but hasn't put a label to it.

If the HSP, male or female, tries to discuss these feelings or this feeling of disconnect with a partner, and if the partner brushes off the discussion, brushes off the person, or says, "Not now. Not tonight", or "Let's talk about this another time", or "Don't be so silly", it only takes a comment or two like that and the HSP will shut down again. It only takes a sentence and the HSP shuts right down and thinks, "Remind me never to talk about my feelings again." And I think this may be similar to what you were describing before with your question about shutting down and refusing to feel. Because the Adrenalin Arousal that is experienced by the HSP, even trying to talk about something that is personal, can be debilitating. And keeping the peace is a greater need than talking about it.

The talking about it brings Adrenalin Arousal. And so, the House-Mate Syndrome is often about hiding. It's often about hiding the pain of feeling disconnected. It's often about hiding the fear that a person feels in their body. The fear that makes the person want to say, "Stay away. Get away from me." It's about hiding the fear of escalation of Adrenalin Arousals if we talk about it, or confront a topic that is very personal and very painful. It is hiding the fear of perhaps the relationship not working. There are many times that the HSP, in his or her dwelling, thinking, thinking, thinking, "What if this relationship doesn't work? What if this marriage breaks down? What if it gets so bad I have to leave? How will I manage?" All this thinking that goes on about leaving is all inside the head. The non-HSP partner is not aware.

The HSP Syndrome is also about hiding the fear of going crazy. Hiding the fear of being different. Hiding the fear of other people knowing. There is so much about hiding the fear that this blocking, this withdrawing, this distancing that happens, often only by one, leads to indifference. And indifference kills relationships faster than argument and conflict.

Indifference ends up feeling like, "I don't care. I couldn't give a damn." Indifference leads to the deterioration of a relationship, and at the end, when the kids are grown up and gone, it leads to separations where one will say, "We just grew apart." Or maybe both will say, "We don't love each other anymore."

You would be amazed the number of times that it's only one that feels like that, who thinks, "We're growing apart." And the other one says, "What do you mean? I love you." The House-Mate Syndrome has arrived. So, what to do? What to do when you recognise that you are in a House-Mate Syndrome.

First of all, the more Reactive Person, if he or she is aware – let's say that the relationship is like this – must become more aware of the impact of their reactivity on a partner. If there is brusque comments, explosions of frustration, everyone of those is having an impact on the HSP.

Bit by bit, the resentments build up. So, the Reactive Person needs to be aware of his or her own behaviour. Also has to be aware of the silence of the partner. This seminar today is called 'The Silence of the HSP'. Because the HSP will withdraw and go quiet, and the Reactive Person or the non-HSP partner needs to be able to observe that and go, "What is wrong? Need to talk." And then the best thing the Reactive partner can say is, "Is there something you need to talk about?" in a really NON-frustrated voice.

If the HSP feels safe to talk, she will and it will be resolved and the connection will be back, because the way that Adrenalin and stress is released in an HSP is to talk about it or just say it – just say how they feel in a non-conflict environment. And it's over. They need to feel safe.

Now, the Avoidant Person needs to do something as well. The HSP has to learn what to do. The HSP often feels that they have a monopoly on bad feelings because they feel these intensities of feelings. The HSP doesn't have a monopoly. They just feel more and more intensely. It is not always somebody else's responsibility to look after your feelings.

So, if you're an HSP, you have to learn to communicate. You have to rehearse things in your head that you want to say and you have to take the courage to say it. Typically, HSPs get frozen and there's often a disconnect between what's going on in their head and their mouth. Non-HSPs don't get that. They don't understand that frozen response. Any HSPs will know what I'm talking about. But to actually say it means you have to push past the Adrenalin Arousal. The Adrenalin Arousal is about – a) Talking about something that is difficult and – b) Anticipating a negative response. And you have to take the courage to push past that Adrenalin Arousal, push past the fear and say it. Because otherwise, the dwelling on it and the thinking about what might happen is going to be as bad as what happens anyway. So, you've got to learn to talk.

The HSP also must recognise the impact of their silence on the partner. There was a lot of times that I thought that I was the more grown up one in the relationship because I didn't get mad or yell. I would keep calm, I would keep silent. Not realising of course, that my withdrawn silence (that I self-righteously thought was a better way to behave), was actually having an impact on my partner. He then felt excluded, ignored, shut out, punished. I never knew that. I never knew that my silence was having that effect on somebody else.

But it's because, in the world of the non-HSP and the world of the Reactive Person, they just talk about stuff when it's a problem and that's the end of it. And so, after years I finally learned that I too could talk, and that it was over, and the world still kept turning. I had to learn to push past. However, there are times to choose to talk, and sometimes looking at a partner and saying it face-to-face is too stimulating – it causes an Adrenalin Arousal. Good times to talk might be going for a walk, side-by-side, not looking at each other. Driving is the same thing. Side-by-side it could be good. You could even revisit Lover's Lane and sit in the car and talk. Just an idea. It's all about the HSP managing their over-arousal, pushing past that fear to raise conversation.

So, if the House-Mate Syndrome exists in your relationship, know that it can be restored. It is not the end of the relationship, it is not the end of the world. It is a matter of re-connecting. And because you are the one listening to this seminar and you are the one learning about how to manage your own emotion, then you are the one who can perhaps learn to manage over-arousal to make things better. Remember, the HSPs don't have a monopoly on bad feelings.

And so, in terms of managing over-arousal, here are some things to be aware of. I'm going to divide this next section up into three. I'm going to talk about things in general, I'm going to talk about what you can do on a daily basis and I'm also going to talk about what you can do at work - because work can sometimes be a very arousing place.

But, in general, if you're an HSP proceed slowly in new situations. Take your time, let things become familiar to you bit by bit. If you rush, and things are too new and unfamiliar, too quickly, you will become over-stimulated and you will become over-whelmed. The over-

whelmed feeling is debilitating. It's sort of a, "Oh, I don't know what to do." It's a panicky feeling. Be aware of that, if you feel it, just do some breathing, calm yourself down, continue to proceed.

Even positive things can be over-stimulating. So, if you're in a party that you really looked forward to, it can be over-stimulating when you're there. Lights, sounds, new people. If you're going on a holiday and it involves travel – travel-plan, plane, new airport, taxis, different language. Over-stimulating will become over-whelmed which will feel like you don't want to be there. This is why it's so confusing when you're an HSP, because you want to go on holiday and yet, it's so stressful getting there. And then you take a day to unwind, just from getting to the holiday.

HSPs often have what we call a Pause & Check Response. And you notice this also in children. Now, a Pause & Check Response is when something new hits you, when somebody asks you a question, or you are presented with a new idea - and your brain has to quickly think it through, think through the complications, the ramifications, the possible dangers before you can respond. It's sort of an over-whelming feeling, but there's a gap between the information coming to you and the response.

So, again, example. I'll give you an example of recently, I rang my brother who lives in America and asked him could I come to stay. I've never been to America and I thought it would be a great opportunity to fly with my mother who's in her eighties – could we come and stay with him and his wife and family. Because of the distance between us, the geographical

distance, I don't know my brother very well, we've been living apart for twenty years, I don't know his daily routine, I don't know his work.

And so, when he hesitated on the phone – there was this silence – I immediately thought, "He doesn't want us to come, he doesn't want to see me." All it was, was a Pause & Check. New information. Out of the blue. (He told me about this afterwards). He had to stop and think, "What are we doing? Can we fit this in? What will the sleeping arrangements be? Can I get time off work at that time? The children will just have started school." He was thinking through all of those things before he gave a response. So, instead of a spontaneous, "Yes, fantastic, how wonderful. Come", my HSP brother did a Pause & Check, and this HSP sister was immediately thinking, "Something's wrong, he doesn't want to see me." We got over that very quickly, but that's the sort of thing I'm talking about.

There was another occasion when an old boss of mine – I can remember, I had just done a counselling session, my head was filled with what had happened in that session, I was writing down my notes – and my boss came with a piece of paper and said, "Here, can you have a look at this and tell me what you think?" And I was taken aback. And in my mind I'm thinking, "What am I meant to be commenting on? Am I meant to be commenting on what's written here, or the layout, or the font, or the colour?" It was something for the newsletter. And so I hesitated because my brain was thinking, "What does she want?" And then my boss came and said, "Obviously you don't think it's very good." And pulled it back, because I had not been spontaneous in my response. But all I was having was a Pause & Check, thinking, "What is going on here?" It was only a matter of seconds. But the person who is not an HSP, doesn't need that time to reflect and to check for danger. That's an HSP response.

What the HSP also must do is to change expectations about how other people are going to interact with them. And the very nature of people is that they are egotistical and they are self-centred. That's the nature of people. And so, if the HSP thinks, "All people are going to speak to me nicely, and treat me nicely like I treat them", then they're going to be very sorry. So, they have to know that not everybody is an HSP. Remember, only about twenty percent of the population is.

Most people say it as it is. And they're not necessarily taking any attention to how you feel, or how the tone of their voice is, or the words that they say. So, HSPs have to be aware of that and manage the over-arousal that harsh words and harsh tones have on them. Other people don't necessarily have the same empathy that you do. And so, if you feel as though the other person has hurt you, you have to say to yourself, "Hmm. Well, if they don't fully understand how I feel, then they're not deliberately hurting me." And you have to change the interpretation in your brain that there is a threat, and that way you can calm down your own stress response.

You have to spend time focussing on the positives of others and the positives of your own mind. If you can consciously and deliberately think about things that you are grateful for and things that make you happy, you can actually calm down your own Adrenalin Arousal. Important for HSPs to develop their own spirituality – and to find strength and comfort and calming in their own spiritual life.

Now, on a daily basis, what an HSP needs to do is to recognise that they will need time alone from time to time. That's okay. An HSP can be extremely social, extremely gregarious, not necessarily shy – as long as they feel safe in an environment, they can be very outgoing.

Even so, there will be times that the HSP needs time alone. Often it's at night, often it's the pottering around before you go to bed. Or it's the sitting doing a crossword, or these days it's playing Solitaire on the computer. Just time alone – withdrawing from the children, withdrawing from your partner. It might only be ten minutes. Hiding in the bathroom with a magazine is a good one. But recognise that the unwinding and calming down your nervous system away from other people is quite okay. Going for a walk is even better, because not only do you have quiet time, but you're doing a bit of exercise – because exercise will help you to use up the Adrenalin that your body is storing and help to lower Adrenalin levels.

Make sure you get enough sleep. Sleep deprivation can be an over-stimulation. If you think about children as an example – because children are also HSPs – the child who is tired must be put to bed at that time. Because, if you just leave it that much too long and they become over-stimulated, it's like adults getting their second wind. They have an Adrenalin Response which then keeps them awake for another hour or so.

Go outdoors. If you're a person who gets topped up by nature, go outside. Look at your garden, look at the trees. Anything that tops you up and makes you feel good will help you settle your Adrenalin levels – because, Adrenalin is only created when there is fear.

Plan enjoyable activities. Do things that make you feel good. That might be the card game, it might be watching a favourite TV programme, it might be spending time with your best friend, catching up with your girlfriend for coffee. But plan to do these things so that you have a balance in your life of positive and negative. The negative, you don't try and create – it just happens. The positive, you can try and create.

Do breathing techniques. If you practice meditation, or practice yoga, then you will learn breathing that helps your body to calm down. And if you are focusing on the present tense, then you're not going to be thinking about anything that is dangerous or threatening.

In a work environment, there are many things that are over-stimulating. And so, if you're at work, you may wish to put on some music that is calming and helps you to feel more relaxed. Because you're an HSP and you're aware of your environment, you may want to make sure that the air in your room is fresh. Open windows. And that the temperature is comfortable. HSPs can't work or concentrate very well when their environment is unpleasant or uncomfortable.

You may need to be in an office with light – with natural light. Non-HSPs don't care about that so much. HSPs need that. Or if you can't put up pictures of natural things – of nature areas that you enjoy, whether it's seaside or forest or waterfalls. Bring plants in. Plants bring the nature in to you.

You may need to get a chair that is comfortable - because if you have a chair that is uncomfortable, gives you backache, is too tight, or the arms on the chair annoy you – all of

these things, without you realising it, will cause you to have Adrenalin Arousal. It's equivalent to the tight socks and the wrinkles in the sheet. So, make sure that your chair and your work environment is not only pleasant for you to look at, but it has to feel right. Recently, I had an office chair given to me and it was a lovely chair, but I keep on sliding out of it. The back wasn't quite right.

Smile frequently. Even if you are working by yourself, you know that when you smile - when you activate these cheek muscles, even if you're smiling to yourself - you're sending a message to your brain that everything is all right. Because we actually only ever smile when everything's right with the world. We don't smile when we feel fearful, we don't smile when we feel over-aroused. On the contrary, when we feel over-aroused, we actually have a furrowed brow and thin tight lips and a mouth that is down and dour. So, if you actually smile deliberately, even to yourself, you start to cheer up because the Limbic System gets the message that everything is fine. There's no danger. And you cease to create Adrenalin.

If your work allows it, take a mental-health day every now and again. I had a fabulous boss years ago, who was a social work director, and I was working as a social worker at the Gold Coast Hospital in Australia. She would say to her team of social workers, "Organise yourself a mental-health day. Have a day off when it suits your diary and the diary of everybody else. Because otherwise, you are going to get sick, and then you'll have to take a day off on sick leave when it interferes with everybody else's calendar and they're going to have to cover for you."

So, she would say, "Organise a day, once every two or three months, pay your bills, go for a walk, go to the mountain. But make sure you check first that somebody can cover for you and there are no emergencies or no doubling up with anybody else." And she instilled in me the importance of emotional health and HSPs need that, they need a stress free day and they need a day off – legitimately – and gosh, that's a good feeling.

Or you may have to explore changes in your job that suit your person better. For example, I mentioned my HSP brother in America. He actually leaves home at 6am to drive to work. He works for a pharmaceutical company and has to travel nearly forty five minutes to get to work. He has realised that by going early, he misses a lot of the traffic congestion. Then he's entitled to come home early and he's able to help with the children at home. And what that means is that he then doesn't feel guilty – which is an HSP arouser – about being an absent dad, and not helping out with two young children. So he's worked it out that he keeps his Adrenalin levels low both ends of the day. Because he's also driving home when it's not peak hour.

And if worst comes to worst and you really can't cope with the Adrenalin Arousal at work – with all of those suggestions – maybe it's time to change jobs. That's okay too. Because, if you are working in an environment where you have so many Adrenalin Arousal that you feel fearful all of the time – maybe because of colleagues, maybe because of the office, maybe because of the boss – you're going to be so stressed and so mentally impaired because of the chemical imbalance, that you're not going to be able to function very well at your work anyway.

So, learn what is wrong for you. Give yourself permission to know what is wrong for you. Say, "This person is wrong to be near. This place, this job is wrong for me. I will be better off moving." Find something else and move. Is there going to be an Adrenalin Arousal about telling your boss you're going? Of course, because it's not easy for an HSP to go to a boss and say, "I'm not going to work here anymore. I'm going to another job." But, it's short-lived. You get over the arousal. You leave and you go, "Phew that's over." And then you can work in a better environment.

At times of conflict, whether the conflict is at home or at work, you're going to have Adrenalin Arousals. HSPs will usually experience an over-arousal if there's conflict in their environment, even if it doesn't involve them. If you are in the work place and there's two people over here arguing or fighting, you will have an Adrenalin Arousal. If you're sitting in a presentation at work and the person who's the speaker loses his place or gets interrupted with a difficult question, you sitting in the audience will have an over-arousal. Non-HSPs don't have that feeling. But as an HSP, you will have that feeling. Know what it is – it's an Adrenalin Arousal. It doesn't kill you. It's your system responding to perceived threat. Do all the strategies to calm yourself down.

And if you have to be involved in conflict – let's say it's a work situation – ask for a certain environment so that you can manage that as best you can. If you have to have a difficult discussion with a colleague or a boss, choose a place that is private, not public. If you have conflict in public, it causes even more of an arousal and you feel humiliated. Avoid being tired. Don't organise those sorts of meetings at the end of the day.

The same is if you've got things to talk about with your partner at home. Don't do it at eleven o'clock at night. Sit on it. Wait until tomorrow morning or organise to have coffee together on Saturday morning because you've got some things to talk about. And organise a morning meeting.

You just can't take too much all at once. Driving here to the seminar today, we were driving in a major storm. There was torrential rain and a lot of lightening. The radio was on in the car, I was thinking about the seminar, and Mike was talking to me about some family matters – all at the same time. It was all too much, so I turned down the radio and he said, "Why? What's wrong?" And I said, "Because I can't do four things at once. It's too over-stimulating." Once the radio was down, I could cope with the storm, the lightning, Mike talking to me on my way to the seminar. I could manage three, not four.

We have to be aware of who we are. We have to sometimes ask for some support. Ask to turn the music down, ask to leave the conversation until later, ask to not go to the party because we've been to the beach all day. That's okay. Self-care for an HSP is not self-absorption. It's not self-centredness. Self-care is an investment.

As an HSP, you are going to be able to function with life much better when you have moderate levels of stimulation, moderate levels of arousal - not over-arousal. And so the HSP world will continue on for you, because once an HSP, always an HSP. It is your biological make-up, but it doesn't have to be a disability. You're not flawed. You're like a fifth of the population, so embrace it and enjoy it.

**Dr. Mike Gosling:**

Thank you Karen for helping us understand what's becoming a major problem in relationships. Surviving indifference. The House-Mate Syndrome has arrived and each of us needs to look within our own relationships and ask, "Am I displaying indifference?"

The next seminar in the 12-part seminar series *Surviving Life Dramas*, is *Surviving Emotional Pain*. Pain in the past is remembered as anger. Pain in the future is perceived as anxiety. All of us need to experience our pain in present-moment-awareness.

I'll see you at the next seminar, *Surviving Emotional Pain*. I'm Dr. Mike Gosling from the Emotional Wealth Academy.