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**John Moe:** My son finished college recently, but when he was very young—three or four years old—he became aware of *King Kong*. I don't know how it came up. And *King Kong* was fascinating to him and pretty scary. And he asked me if King Kong was a monster, if he was a bad guy. And I said, “No, I think he's just misunderstood.” King Kong was living his life on this island, doing King Kong things. And then, you know, these guys show up and attack him and take him away from home. And Kong wanted to be home. He wanted to stay home. He wanted to get home. And he felt the need to protect himself. And because he's huge and strong, that was really scary for the humans, because they didn't take the time to understand the guy and the situation he was in.

King Kong was misunderstood. “Same with Frankenstein,” I said, which was a whole other conversation that we then needed to have.

When you understand something scary, it's usually not as scary. You can understand the motivations of this no-longer-a-monster; figure out how to live with it or avoid it. Whatever's best. That can go for really tall apes, or for something else scary: mental illness. Anxiety is really scary if it's misunderstood. If you see it as a harmful force hurting you for no reason, that's scary. It's not as scary when you understand it might be your mind's way of protecting you. Doing a bad job of it, sure. Maybe using out-of-date information, but trying. So, you learn to work with it, make it not so scary. Depression sucks and lies, but to some extent it is trying to make sure you don't get hurt by not letting you feel anything. We try to help you understand mental health on this program in order to make it not so scary. And we're not the only ones making that effort.

It's *Depresh Mode*. I'm John Moe. I'm glad you're here. Another way to put that is:

**Music:** “I’m Happy You’re Here” by Ashly Burch.

*I'm Happy You're Here (I'm happy you're here)*

*Happy you're here (I'm happy you're here)*

*Happy you're here (I'm you're happy you're here)*

*Happy you're here*

*I'm happy you're here*

*(Music ends.)*

**Speaker:** I’m happy you’re here too!

**John Moe:** That's the theme song to a new YouTube program. *I'm Happy You're Here*, starring and created by Ashly Burch. The first episode is now online, and it focuses on anxiety. *I'm Happy You're Here* features Ashly and a whole lot of puppets in a kind of *Pee-wee's Playhouse* or *Mr. Rogers* kind of setting, explaining and demystifying mental health issues. There is swearing on this show. There are some references to Ashly having sex with one of the puppets. It's a show for adults. It's not for kids. Ashly Burch is an actor, video maker, writer. She was in the series *Mythic Quest*, done voices for a ton of video games and animated shows like *Adventure Times*, *Steven Universe*, *Fortnite*, *The Last of Us: Part Two*, and the *Borderlands* series of games.

Ashly and her brother, Anthony, created the video game sketch comedy series *Hey Ash, Whatcha Playin'?* which has over 60,000,000 views on YouTube. Ashly has dealt with anxiety for a long time, as well as trauma response and OCD.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Ashly Burch, welcome to *Depresh Mode*.

**Ashly Burch:** Thanks for having me!

**John Moe:** Your show is called *I'm Happy You're Here*. On this podcast, I always start the show by saying, "I'm glad you're here."

(Ashly chuckles.)

And for the record, can you and I be in agreement that we are both—you and I—happy and glad that the listener is here?

**Ashly Burch:** Yes. I think that is a safe assumption. I co-sign that. That is okay with me. Yes. (Laughs.)

**John Moe:** Okay, good. We have reached an accord about the statement of how we hope that you are. I thought *I'm Happy You're Here* was delightful and insightful as well. But maybe you can describe this show better than I can. What is *I'm Happy You're Here*?

**Ashly Burch:** Well, thank you for saying that. The way that I sort of quickly pitch *I'm Happy You're Here* is that it's like *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, but for adults. So, there are swear words and sex jokes. But it's focused on mental illness. So, the first episode that we have out is about anxiety. It was sort of precipitated by the fact that, you know, I have an anxiety disorder; I have mild OCD; and I feel like a lot of folks in my either family or social group are getting diagnoses sort of later in life—whether that's ADHD or borderline personality disorder or whatever it happens to be.

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And I just sort of felt like adults need a lot more help than we're given. I think that we hit a certain age, and we're sort of pushed out of the proverbial nest, and everyone's like, "You got this, right?" And I don't think any of us feel like we got it. (*Laughs.*) So, that's sort of the impetus behind the show is to be a support to people that are still trying to figure their lives out.

**John Moe:** Why puppets?

**Ashly Burch:** First of all, I love puppets, and I think they're hilarious. And I think also, like—there's a lot of reasons. So, as you've suggested, *I'm Happy You're Here* has puppets in it. Part of that is like, you know, sort of wink to the shows that I grew up with—whether that's *Sesame Street* or *Mr. Rogers' neighborhood*. So, there is a bit of a like *Wonder Showzen*, *Avenue Q* kind of like it's funny when puppets do awful things or sexual things. And also, it does sort of nod to the shows that I grew up with. And also, I think that it's actually a pretty effective tool for talking about heavier subjects. 'Cause I think seeing a puppet in a depressive spiral is funnier than seeing a human in a depressive spiral. (*Chuckles.*)

So, I think it lets us talk about difficult subjects in a funny way. So, it doesn't like—'Cause the other thing with the show is not wanting it to be a bummer to watch. Like, I want people to feel seen. I want it to be informative, and I also don't want you to feel worse than when you started. So, I think it lets us handle heavy subjects with a lighter hand by using puppets.

**John Moe:** Well, let's talk about your experiences with anxiety. How far do you go back with anxiety?

**Ashly Burch:** I remember having it ever since I was a kid. I'm trying to think of when it really manifested. I think I was... I was pretty young. Mm. I'm bad with ages. I'll say eight and hope that no jury will convict me. (*Chuckles.*) So, I think around eight, is probably when I started having anxiety disorders—or anxiety problems. And they manifested predominantly around eating. And not in like an eating disorder kind of way, but like I—for whatever reason—got really scared of throwing up when I was a kid. And I just sort of had this anxious response. Whenever I ate, I was afraid I would throw up. That was like sort of my anxious fixation for a while. And then it just sort of became about everything in my life, (*chuckles*) as I grew up. But that was sort of the first time I remember having really intense, anxious thoughts.

**John Moe:** And you say it became about everything else. What are some—like, as you got older, as you became an adolescent, as a teenager, where did the anxiety show up?

**Ashly Burch:** It's often connected to social connections and... productivity. Like, the big sort of anxious thoughts that I have will be about like, "I'm not doing enough, or I'm gonna screw up in some way with a loved one." So, like, it'll be sort of playing, you know, Monday night quarterback with a thing that I said or did or didn't do in a social situation. Or I can kind of beat myself up for not doing enough or doing something poorly in like a work situation. So, it attaches to those categories the most, I would say. Probably.

**John Moe:** I always wonder about anxiety—and it's something that I deal with as well, just to be candid on that. Like— And you talk about this in your show. There is a reason for it on a basic level, there's a motivation for it. There's often a fear of not being protected. There's almost like an animal instinct. You know? Will I get not get enough food? Will I not get enough shelter? Will I die if—you know, if something like this happens?

And it often—that kind of depth of the motivation for anxiety is so far down there that it's hard to access when you're keeping so busy with the anxiety itself. Does that understanding that maybe you've gotten by looking into it—clearly, you've done your research for this show—does that help the anxiety to understand more about it?

**Ashly Burch:** Well, yes! Yes and no. I mean, there's like a—I think there's a ceiling to what—for me, at least—to what understanding the origin does for me.

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So, in the earlier stages of being in therapy, it was revelatory that my anxiety was based on either like a sort of... What's the word I'm looking for? A disconnection from like my attachment figures was a big part of it. So, like the way that I was raised, and the sort of— You know, not to get too deep in the weeds, but like attachment style wise, I'm anxious attachment. Which is basically like I expect you to leave. And I'm like, “Great, fuck off then.” And then if you start to leave, I'm like, “Wait, where are you going?!”

And so, (*laughs*) that's kind of how I came into the world and operate in the world. And it helped me have compassion for that part of me. And then I did hit a moment in therapy where I was like, “Yeah, I understand why I am the way that I am, and I'm tired of it.” And that was sort of a... that was an interesting moment for me, because then I sort of realized like I had to do something different. And I think it's sort of a developmental— Like, if you're trying to heal for long enough, I feel like there's always like other layers of an onion that you're peeling back.

And so for me, learning about anxiety disorders and how they form—like, literally like the fight or flight response aspect of it, but then also how those are developed based on like how you're raised—helped me make sense to myself and helped me develop compassion. And then past that, I had to do more and different types of work to continue to like untangle. Because what I found was I hit a wall at a certain point with a therapy that I was doing where I felt like—like I was saying; I knew why I was the way that I was, and I didn't feel it getting any better. And then I had to— So, then I ended up pivoting to EMDR as like a therapeutic modality to help me kind of get deeper into my subconscious and the stuff that was blocking me from having compassion for the part of me that was anxious.

So, it was both. I think I really needed that understanding when I first started doing therapy and first started understanding my childhood and my family. And then I had to kind of go deeper after a certain point.

**John Moe:** So, can I ask what you were trying to process with the EMDR? Was there a particular trauma that you were addressing?

**Ashly Burch:** Oh, I have a few! (*Laughs.*) Uh, it's interesting with EMDR, because my understanding of it before going into it was that it was to process like a specific traumatic experience. And I think people often—it is effective at that. And it seems—I've spoken to a few different therapists also just for like research stuff, and it seems like it's also useful just in terms of like general attachment problems and a more general—like, challenges in childhood that you need to sort of unwind and reprocess. So, a lot of it ends up being—

Like, I've had some grief stuff that it was hard for me to process in just normal therapy that I've looked at. But then also, I've found that it's done a lot of like—it's helped me with a lot of subconscious stuff from my childhood that I didn't really realize was there. Like, my relationship with my dad I didn't really touch very much in just my general talk therapy sessions. And then there was something about EMDR that brought up a lot of that relational connection with my dad. That was linked to sort of how I view myself and like the tolerance or lack of tolerance that I have about my difficulties.

So, it's funny with EMDR, because I like try to talk to friends about it and it sounds insane every time I do it. (*Laughs.*) I'm like, “I swear I'm not in a cult. I swear I'm not.” You know? But it's a funny thing, 'cause you'll start with a sort of heightened or intense memory or something, and then it'll just go in all these different directions that you're not expecting. And it reveals things that you didn't even know were in there. So, I'll start with a memory and then end up somewhere fucking (*laughs*) way out in the middle of nowhere in my brain that I did not know was there. So, yeah, the short answer to your question is I feel like what it's helping me with is integrating sort of the way that my childhood was and the grief around that.

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Like, letting me feel the grief and the feelings around my childhood that I couldn't feel when I was a kid. That is helping me have like more space and tolerance for the reactions and difficulties I have now as an adult.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** More with Ashly Burch and more details about EMDR treatment—what it is, how it work—after a break. Before the break, here's a bit more of Ashly's show *I'm Happy You're Here*. Ashly and some puppets.

**Clip:**

**Music:** Soothing pharmaceutical commercial style music.

**Ashly Burch:** Mental health issues affect one in four people on the planet. One in four. That is a staggering number. That means that almost 800,000,000 people on the planet suffer from some kind of mental health issue.

**Speaker:** (*Interjecting.*) Uh, it's 1.9 billion.

**Ashly Burch:** Sorry, what?

**Speaker:** It's 1.9 billion, not—y-you said 800,000,000. Your math is a little off.

**Ashly Burch:** (*Irritated, under her breath.*) Yeah, of course it is. I knew this was gonna happen. (*Getting louder.*) I knew I was gonna fuck up the show! Didn't I tell you I was gonna fuck up the show, Jeff?!

**Jeff:** Uh, you're doing fine. We can edit this out.

(*Smashing sounds.*)

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** Back with Ashly Burch, and we've been talking about EMDR: eye movement desensitization and reprocessing therapy.

For the benefit of listeners, can you—? And I know that there are different approaches; people use different techniques with it. Can you describe what it was for you? Like, what actually happens when you go into the room? Because I think— You know, I don't want to gloss over it. And I also don't want to ignore how, as you say, weird it is. (*Laughs.*)

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah. It's kooky. (*Laughs.*) So, my— Yeah, I can just kind of describe what an EMDR session is for me, sort of. So, I'll go in, and my therapist will, you know, sort of ask what's going on. And what I have found is that if I have a charged reaction to anything happening in my life in the moment, we can use that. 'Cause it usually ends up connecting somewhere else. So, it could be like, you know, a trigger I'm having around work or a conflict with a partner or a friend or something. And that might be where it starts. And then during the session it might go all the way back to my childhood or somewhere else.

But anyway, we'll start there. And I don't know that—I'm sure that many EMDR practitioners do this. But basically, I think she asks me—I'm trying to remember what order she asks me. She asks how intense—she asked me to feel into my body and to sort of report like where am I feeling the feelings that I'm having, and what are they? So, you know, I feel angry. I can feel it in my fists and in my belly. Or I'm feeling, you know, grief or sadness. I can feel it in my chest. It feels like my chest is caving in, you know. And then she'll ask me on a scale of one to 10—one, there's no reaction. 10 is it's as powerful as it gets. Where does my reaction sit on that scale? And then there's also—

You know, I think the big part of it with EMDR is trying to retrain your brain, in terms of maybe negative self-perceptions that you have. So, she'll begin by asking, “What is something that you believe about yourself?” So, it might be something as, quote/unquote, “simple” as “I'm afraid I'm unlovable.”

And then she'll say, "What do you want to believe about yourself?"

And then I'll say like, "That I am lovable," or, you know, that I'm fine the way that I am. I don't have to be any different, whatever it is.

And then she'll ask me, "On a scale of one to seven, how true is that? Like, how much do you believe it?" And then I'll rank that.

And then we'll go into the session. And the way that I do it is I hold buzzers. So, EMDR is all about bilateral stimulation. So, it— Basically, the idea being that either you—through eye movement by looking left and right, by holding buzzers that buzz at different intervals, or people also use headphones that'll beep in different ears at different times.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Sometimes a pen that they follow from one side to the other.

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah. There's a pen that you can follow back and forth. The idea being that it's activating both hemispheres of your brain as you talk about a difficult emotion or a traumatic experience. And the kooky thing about EMDR is that no one really understands fully why it works. There is a lot of evidence that it does work, but no one 100% knows why. *(Laughs.)* Which is—

**John Moe:** There are theories, but—yeah, it's a hard thing to prove scientifically, exactly.

**Ashly Burch:** Yes. Which I think is why therapists will do that sort of tracking thing of like, "Where did you start, and how intense was it?" And then they ask you again at the end of session. So, I might start at an eight in terms of like my disturbance level.

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And I might—you know, if my personal belief is I'm a piece of shit—and I might believe that at a seven; like, there's no way that I'm not a piece of shit—at the end of the session, my disturbance level might go down to a four, and I actually might believe that I'm a good person or something. *(Laughs.)* Like, in terms of—you know. So, that's, I think, also why they do that. Because it is a sort of—it's a difficult to define. And like they—I think even— You know, I've spoken to a few different therapists that were like, "When I started learning about EMDR, I was like, 'this is bullshit. Like, this sounds like pseudoscience.'" And then they learn it, and then they have it done on them, and they're like, "Oh no, it actually does work."

And so, there is— Like, labeling and tracking from beginning to end of session I think it's a big part of it, because they know that it's a little bit kooky. It feels a little bit kooky. And the process of actually doing it, for me, is kind of difficult to describe. It can range from activating intense somatic experiences. So, like... you know, if I have feelings that are stored in my body that I don't have access to on a normal day, I might feel them during EMDR. Like, a bunch of anger might come up or, you know, a bunch of sadness. I might think of a memory that I haven't thought of in a long time that has emotions attached to it that connects to something that's happening to me in my current day.

Or sometimes I have visuals that are like not—I am not like, “Whoa, tripping,” like kind of thing. But like I will... things will come up that are almost like... a narrative. Like, I'm watching a narrative that's showing me something. And it totally varies, and it goes all over the map. And usually what ends up happening is that at some point I have a release or a realization, or something shifts. And so, almost to a session, I end up—at the end of the process of doing EMDR, I will feel that I have uncovered something or that I've shifted perspective a little bit.

So, I really love it and find it very effective. And also, I have the awareness of how truly bonkers it sounds when I talk about it. So.

*(They laugh.)*

**John Moe:** No, I've talked about that, and I've written about this too. When it was offered to me as an option to deal with a very particular trauma that I was having a hard time with, I thought, “Well, I'm at a crossroads here. Like, 'cause this sounds like hooey. And I can just walk away from this. Or I can go, and either it'll be fantastic, or it'll be so ridiculous that it'll make for a wonderful story that I can tell people about this ridiculous process.”

*(Ashly agrees.)*

But I made a conscious decision like, “If I'm gonna try this, let's try it all the way. Let's not judge it while it's happening. Let's not stand outside of it and evaluate it as it's happening.” You know, let's get in the pool instead of walking around the edge of it. And I wonder if that buying into it is part of why it does work. That people who are in a bind with some trauma—whether it's a simple trauma or complex trauma—that they choose to be helped by it. And that's a part of it.

Like, I think sometimes the term placebo gets used as a pejorative when there might be really something to suspending—you know, just cutting the disbelief and the analysis out of it and just diving in.

**Ashly Burch:** Right. I wonder if that's honestly a part of like any healing modality. Which it gets a little—I mean, it gets tricky, right? Because that's also why I'm not just talking about—

**John Moe:** If you've already made the copay, then—*(chuckles)* yeah.

**Ashly Burch:** Right! Yeah. Like, you know, I'm developing for—hopefully the next thing we're gonna do for *I'm Happy You're Here* is basically talking about different types of therapy and like how you find a therapist, how you pay for it, what are red and green flags, and then the different modalities. And you know, I was writing one about EMDR. And you know, I basically said like, “If this sounds fucking weird, that's fine. Like, you don't have to do it. Just know that if you're interested or you're curious about it, like no one's going to like ask you to buy a bunch of supplements after, or like—” *(Laughing.)* You know what I mean?



Like, it's not gonna—you're not all of a sudden gonna become part of an MLM or like—you know. So, it is this tricky thing. I mean, it's the same thing with—I had a similar experience doing TM, 'cause I learned how to do TM a number of years ago.

**John Moe:** Transcendental meditation.

**Ashly Burch:** Transcendental meditation. Thank you.

[00:25:00]

And you know, it's another thing where it's a meditation that you pay to be instructed in, and it has a long lineage. And so, part of the experience when you first start learning it is that you make an offering, basically, to the guru that came up with it. So, you're instructed to bring, I think, flowers into fruit or something. And there's like a tiny, little ceremony. And it's a difficult thing, I think, when you're looking for healing, because—I even talked to my therapist at the time about it. I was like, “Is this snake oil? Am I totally just like giving money to this place that is like doing one over on me?”

And he was like, “No, no. It's like there's research around it; it is helpful.”

So, it is this tricky thing of, you know, people are looking for healing, and they're looking for guidance. And it's a difficult—maybe the— At least for me, if someone acts like there's an easy way out of something, then I am suspicious. But like EMDR is still hard work. And transcendental meditation, you still have to sit down and do it. So, there's no one that is like, “Just give me 200 bucks and move to this commune, and I'll solve all your problems.” There's still like a you have to buy in, and you have to be a participant in your own healing and recovery. But I think there is an understandable skepticism around some of this stuff that I try to be aware of when I'm talking to people about it.

'Cause yeah, I mean... I think when I first heard about EMDR, I was like, *(muttering)* “This sounds so weird... I don't understand how it works.” Or even TM, you know, and doing a ritual before learning a meditation, there is always a feeling of like, “Am I about to be inducted into a cult?” But it's—you know. I think that's the problem with some of the toxic versions of it is that people are using something that's like quite a pure and human desire for healing and for guidance and for spiritual growth and then like using it to their advantage. So, yeah. I will say from my experience, EMDR has not led to me being like a Scientologist or something.

*(They laugh.)*

It's just helpful.

**John Moe:** Well, let me ask you—and I am going somewhere with this question—but you are an actor. Were you trained as an actor? Did you go to a lot of drama schools and take a lot of classes?

**Ashly Burch:** I am one of those— I don't know if it's ill-advised, but I'm one of those self-taught, like do weird videos on the internet to learn how to act kind of kind of gals.

*(John affirms with a laugh.)*

So, I've taken a class or two, but really most of my stuff has been doing stupid sketches with friends and sort of on-the-job training. *(Laughs.)*

**John Moe:** Okay. Well, I ask because I'm a former actor who took all those classes that you didn't.

*(Ashly laughs.)*

Like, I took a million classes. And one of the things that really tripped me up was I thought, “Do I need to like declare a religion here? Like, do I need to be a follower of one school of thought and do everything—?”

And only—you know—much, much later did I realize, “Oh, I'm just shopping for tools. Like, I can do these things. And if I find something, ‘Oh, that works for me!’ That's great. I'll keep going with that. That part there? That doesn't work for me. I just won't worry about that so much anymore.” And I wonder the same thing about mental health treatment.

*(Ashly agrees.)*

Whether that's EMDR or TM, like you said; whether that's TMS—transcranial magnetic stimulation. Whatever, it is. I think people don't— I think people stress out by saying, “Well, I tried SSRIs,” selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors, “And that didn't work. So, mental health treatment doesn't work for me.” But it's actually much more like a salad bar.

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah, I think you're 100% right. 'Cause this is the other thing I realized too about therapists is that different therapists use different modalities for different clients. So, you know, there's—I have the same fear for people that they—you know, they see a therapist, and they happen to get a bad therapist the first time, and then they're like, “Well, therapy isn't for me.” And you know, I have had—before I found my first like really great therapist, I had two just duds. Ooh, they were bad!

*(They laugh.)*

And if I had stopped after those people, I would not be able to have gotten the healing that I've gotten. And so, there is this thing of— And even with the therapist that I ended up seeing and I don't see anymore, he gave me a sort of foundational baseline of, I would say, somatic therapy.

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So, understanding that feelings are stored in the body. I didn't know about that before I started seeing him.

**John Moe:** Bessel van der Kolk. Yeah.

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah, it was a massive part of understanding who I am and my particular physical and psychological makeup. And I learned about parts work through him as well. So, internal family systems, this idea that we have—there are many—there's not just one solid you; there are many yous that are within you, and they all have different needs and different things that they're trying to do to protect you. And if any of those things sound weird to anyone, like there's a therapist that wouldn't do any of that. There's a therapist that would focus entirely on possibly like behavioral therapy. Or EMDR or, you know, whatever it happens to be. So, yeah, I absolutely think that's true. I think we can sometimes—out of a sense of self protection, I would say—be hypercritical and think like, “Okay, if this person does this one thing that I don't like, then baby out with the bath water.” Or this therapist seems to be into this kind of modality. Or they're religious. Or whatever happens to be. “They can't help me.”

And part of for me, with like trying to heal and grow, is sort of removing the contempt prior to investigation. Like, trying to be open-minded to, “Okay, I haven't done this type of thing before. Maybe it could help.” And like still tapping into my instincts and being like, “Is this the right person for me, or is this the right type of therapy?” But not assuming that because one therapist is bad, all therapists are bad. Or because one medication doesn't work, all medications don't work. Which is a difficult thing, I think, to get yourself to do when you're in pain. So, I have a lot of empathy for it.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Well, and it's hard—especially with something like anxiety or depression; I imagine for OCD—when, I'll say, that the people least equipped to take risks and navigate bureaucratic systems are the ones forced to do so.

**Ashly Burch:** *(Laughs.)* Yeah. Right. Yes. Yeah. Yeah. I think that's a huge impetus as well of wanting to make *I'm Happy You're Here*. Because I just feel like it's already so hard. Exactly as you said, it's already so hard to suffer from a mental health issue of some kind. It's so hard to feel even a little bit of window of hope that you could get better and even have the energy to get help. And then to fucking suffer through—like, wade through the swamp of trying to find any sort of mental health help.

*(John agrees.)*

And so, that was a huge reason of wanting to make this show, even just providing a foundation or a baseline of like, “Maybe this is the experience that you're having.” And validating that and suggesting, hinting, just presenting the possibility that it could be better just to start with. 'Cause for me, I think also—like, I sort of visualize my mental health journey as: it's a brick wall. And I'm trying to slam a sledgehammer against a brick wall. Or a hammer, you know, depending on my energy that day. And I'm chipping away, and I'm chipping away, and I'm chipping away. And at some point, there's a crack, and some light gets through.

And I don't know exactly what it is that tips it over, but it's always like a confluence. It's a building of, "Oh, this talk that I heard from this person; this therapy session I did; this fight I had with this friend; this book I read." They're all sort of culminating in my ability to break through and make a little window in the wall to see something on the other side. So, that's really a huge motivation for the show is like I wanna be another crack in the wall. That you can see that there is something on the other side. There is a possibility of getting better. And also, if you're not there yet, that's okay. Because it's a non-linear and difficult journey. But it is a journey, and it is something that you can progress in and feel relief from.

**Transition:** Spirited acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** As we go to break, here's a bit more from *I'm Happy You're Here*; anxiety tips!

**Music:** "Anxiety!" by Ashly Burch.

*Take some water and—*

*Gargle it!*

*You got a piece of gum?*

*Then chew that shit!*

*Take a look around*

*Count everything that's blue*

*Or take in the sounds surrounding you*

*NOW BREATHE, BITCH!*

*For a count of four*

*AND HOOOLD IT!*

*For a count of seven*

*RELEASE IT!*

*For a count of eight*

*And if none of that's for you*

*You can just sing!*

*La-la-la-la*

*La-la-la-la*

*(Music ends.)*

[00:35:00]

**Promo:**

**Music:** A playful, upbeat track.

**Tom Lum:** Hi, is this Archer?

**Archer:** Yes. Hello. Who is this?

**Tom:** Hi, this is Tom Lum from *Let's Learn Everything*. I'm calling about your Maximum Fun membership's extended warranty. Do you have a few seconds to talk about that?

**Archer:** Uh, I think I have to go.

**Tom:** No! Oh, no, no, no. Oh no, they're gonna be so mad at me.

**Archer:** Okay, fine.

**Tom:** Did you know that as a part of your MaxFun membership's extended warranty, you've even picked as the member of the month. Which is wild! And we're so excited to have you.

**Archer:** That's so exciting. Thank you!

**Tom:** So, as our member of the month, you will also be getting a \$25 gift card to the Maximum Fun store, a special member of the month bumper sticker, a special priority parking spot at MaxFun HQ in Los Angeles, California just for you. Also, I have to read... hold on. I have to read this.

It says, “We at Maximum Fun apologize; you ended up with the worst host of the three. And as consolation, you'll be getting those—” Wh-what? Why was—why is that included? I don't remember that being there for the other—

**Archer:** It's okay. I can settle. It's fine.

**Tom:** (*Cackles.*) Maximum members are the best.

**Speaker:** Become a MaxFun member now at [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join).

(*Music ends.*)

### **Promo:**

**Music:** Fun, exciting music.

**Kirk Hamilton:** Say you like video games—

**Jason Schreier:** And who doesn't?

**Maddy Myers:** I mean some people probably don't.

**Kirk:** Okay, but a lot of people do. So, say you're one of those people, and you feel like you don't really have anyone to talk to about the games that you like.

**Jason:** Well, you should get some better friends.

**Kirk:** Yes, you should get some better friends, but you could also listen to *Triple Click*. (*Click, click, click!*) A weekly podcast about video games hosted by me, Kirk Hamilton.

**Maddy:** Me, Maddy Myers.

**Jason:** And me, Jason Schreier. We talk about new releases, old classics, industry news, and whatever, really.

**Maddy:** We'll show you new things to love about games, and maybe even help you find new friends to talk to about them.

**Kirk:** *Triple Click*. (*Click, click, click!*) It's kinda like we're your friends. Find us at [MaximumFun.org](https://MaximumFun.org) or wherever you get your podcasts.

(*Music fades out.*)

**Transition:** Gentle acoustic guitar.

**John Moe:** We are back with Ashly Burch. I mentioned that she does a ton of voice work in video games and animated TV shows. Here she is as Breezy, a bee who becomes a queen bee on *Adventure Time*.

**Clip:**

**Finn (*Adventure Time*):** Breezy?!

**Breezy:** Yes, Finn. Can't you see?

*(Magical music fades in.)*

I've become a queen to save you, because I love your flower, and I think... I love you!  
*(Zipper sound.)* Now you can partake of my pollen crumbles and become my drone.

**Finn:** Um... you know, I'm trying to keep it casual, B.

**John Moe:** You worked as an actor and as a writer on *Adventure Time*, which is—no secret to anybody who listens to me—is my favorite show.

**Ashly Burch:** Ahh! That's great!

**John Moe:** Out of all the shows. I'm trying to remember if I ever—I did a podcast called *Conversation Parade*, which was all about *Adventure Time*.

**Ashly Burch:** Oh yeah! I remember that!

**John Moe:** I'm trying to remember if I ever interviewed you on that show. I don't think I did, but—

**Ashly Burch:** I don't think you did.

**John Moe:** Yeah. But I wanna ask you—because you were on *Adventure Time*. You wrote for it; you acted on it. You were on *Steven Universe*. You seem to be involved with a lot of projects—and the games that you're involved with too—that are a little off the beaten path and are maybe a little more uplifting than more mainstream things. And I wonder if that's been a conscious choice on your part, or if that's just the crowd you fell in with, or what.

**Ashly Burch:** Man, I mean, I... I was a huge fan of *Adventure Time* before I started working on it. So, I'm very lucky that I got to be a part of that show. I've said this before, but I feel like when I was—I started by doing a voice on the show and then— And I've played a few now, but my first voice that I did was Breezy in—I can't remember what season. But if you are familiar with the show, she is the bee that helps Finn get his arm back. And I became friends with Kent Osborne, who's the head writer and voice director. And Penn Ward was leaving. And so, he asked if I wanted to come in and test, basically, to see if I wanted to—if I could join the writer staff. So, I did like a two-week trial period, basically. And that entire two weeks, it really felt like I was writing fan fiction.

I was like, “What story have I not seen that I think could be interesting?” And I think I pitched... I think the stories that I pitched that two weeks ended up both being made into episodes, if I remember correctly. There's an episode about Lady Rainicorn I think going on a heist with her like ex-boyfriend or ex-husband. And then, there's one that's all about Cinnamon Bun having a squire named Bun-Bun.

Anyway, all that to say, I... I don't know. I mean, maybe I'm just really lucky, but I've have predominantly just been a fan of the things that I have been in. And I don't know if people just know that about me.

[00:40:00]

Or I've just gotten lucky and been able to be a part of those things. But I also sort of wonder if maybe I have a—I sort of hate this word, but like a brand or a persona that fits in these kinds of things.

**John Moe:** Attracts certain projects. Yeah.

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah. 'Cause I tend to not be—as a person and in terms of like how I present myself—not a very cynical or dark person, I would say. I mean the show *I'm Happy You're Here* is like about as far from cynical as someone can get.

(They chuckle.)

So, yeah. I wonder if that's partially why. Although *Adventure Time* is interesting, 'cause it's very—I would describe it as quite existential after a certain point. It like very much became, I think, processing for the people that worked on it.

(They laugh.)

'Cause like the later-season episodes, are very—it feels like a lot of like id of the people that worked on it were put into the show.

**John Moe:** It gets pretty complex as it goes along, absolutely. There's fewer standalone episodes and more we're trying to figure something out. You know, maybe some EMDR would be necessary at some point.



(They laugh.)

Do you think— I mean, I turn to that show sometimes for—not mental health help, but some sort of mental health relief. I imagine a lot of people do that. And I know a lot of people do that with video games, which you do a lot of work on as well. Does that go into the creative process, having that responsibility of knowing how some people are using the product that you make?

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah, I actually— Video games were the thing that helped me the most with my anxiety and my OCD when I was young, before I knew what was happening to me. I really could—I loved all types of media, but video games were the thing that actually absorbed me enough that I was able to calm down and not feel anxious.

One of my favorite games actually is my favorite game because of how pivotal it was for me at that time in my life. *Harvest Moon 64*. There was just something—it was a farming simulator, and there was just something very meditative about playing the game. And I would get so sucked into it that I would forget to be anxious just for the time that I was playing it.

But yeah, I have a tremendous amount of respect for all of the stuff that I work on. I really—I was a fan first of everything. You know? (*Stammering.*) I think that this is a lot more common now, but in my generation and before of voice actors, I think it was often something that people kind of just fell into. Like, they were standups and then discovered voice acting, or they were actors and then discovered voice acting. Versus now, I think maybe my generation and younger specifically got into voice acting because they love cartoons and they love games and they love— You know, it's a thing that they love and have a lot of respect for, and I've always felt that way.

Because I've— Especially like the cartoons and the games that I've been able to be in are really complex, as you said. Like, *Adventure Time* is extremely complex. *Steven Universe* is like, I mean—

**John Moe:** (*Quietly.*) Incredibly complex, yeah.

**Ashly Burch:** —very complex. And also, talk about a show that's like directly trying to help people with their mental health. Like, you know. The song that Rebecca wrote about meditation is beautiful. So, yeah. I've never been one of those people that's like, “Ugh, it's just a video game, or it's just a cartoon.” I'm always like, “Oh my god, it's a video game! It's a cartoon!” (*Chuckles.*) You know, just like excited. That's where some of the most interesting stuff is happening.

**John Moe:** What do you hope people take away from *I'm Happy You're Here*?

**Ashly Burch:** I really hope that... in general, that people get something positive out of it. I found that it is really meaningful to feel seen, especially when you are starting to understand your brain and your relationship to your own mental health. It's just having something that makes you feel like you're not alone is a massive boon. That was a huge thing for me.

I had really bad OCD when I was younger, and it wasn't until I found—I actually found like an online forum of people talking about OCD and their intrusive thoughts. And I felt so much relief, because I finally felt like I wasn't crazy. 'Cause I was just dealing with it by myself for so long. So, I really hope that *I'm Happy You're Here* helps people feel seen. I also hope that it helps them get help. I'd love for it to be a foundation for people to be curious about what is out there for them that can help them with their struggles and their mental health— Whether that's therapy or meditation or support groups or whatever it happens to be.

[00:45:00]

You know what I have found from my own healing is that I need like the relief of connection in a group to know that I'm not alone, and I need tools to help me dig deeper. And I need mechanisms by which I look deeper into myself. And... so, I kind of see the possibility of *I'm Happy You're Here* being like one branch on a tree sort of thing. So, I hope that also like people—I saw a couple of comments on the video that were very, very meaningful to me of someone being like, “I haven't gotten a therapist, and this is maybe the thing that's gonna push me to do it.” Stuff like that is sooo gratifying to me. 'Cause I used to suffer so much. And things are not perfect, but all of the work that I have done—I have so much more serenity and peace than I thought was possible for me to have.

**John Moe:** Do you think that's a result of the research that you've done for this show? Because watching the show, there's stuff about the amygdala in there. There's stuff about all the chemicals that are going on. Did diving into that and getting that information, having to process it and write it and figure out how you were gonna communicate it to a mass audience, did that help your anxiety?

**Ashly Burch:** It absolutely did. Especially because now I'm like, “Well, I gotta—I can't like slouch on this. Like, I gotta practice what I preach. If I'm gonna make a show about mental health, I better be fucking taking care of my mental health.” (*Laughs.*) So, I really like—I feel like *I'm Happy You're Here* has helped me. Like, okay, you can't write a whole series about therapy and then not be gonna therapy. You can't think about writing episodes about meditation and then not be meditating. Like, it's really— It's keeping me on track in a way that like, without it, I might not be as on track. Like, honestly since we released it, I've meditated a lot more, 'cause I'm like trying to keep my mental health balanced, because I want to be of service to people with this show.

So. And it's also—I will say—like, for me, understanding the way that my brain works helps let me off the hook. All that sort of understanding is in service for me of like, okay, I could beat myself up about this, or I could remember that this is like a process in my brain that is malfunctioning. Like, if my amygdala was trained in a different way, I wouldn't react in the way that I'm reacting to the situation. But I have the brain that I have, and I know why it works the way it does. So, I can either hate that brain, or I can go, “Okay. This thing is happening. Let me figure out a grounding exercise I can do. Or let me actually rest, because I've been pushing myself too hard,” or whatever it happens to be.

So, it's just keeping the language of mental health—therapy, meditation, whatever—like at the forefront of my brain in a way that maybe without the show I wouldn't be focusing on as much.

**John Moe:** Yeah. Or turning around and looking at it in those internal family systems you talked about. Like, okay, this guy is here. (*Laughs.*) Like, I'm not, gonna get him out of here. But maybe he needs a new job. Let's put him to work on a new task and manage this crew a little bit.

**Ashly Burch:** Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And like you were saying earlier, I think taking what you like and leaving the rest is such a huge part of healing.

**John Moe:** The mental health salad bar.

**Ashly Burch:** The mental health salad bar.

**Music:** “Building Wings” by Rhett Miller, an up-tempo acoustic guitar song. The music continues quietly under the dialogue.

**John Moe:** Ashly Burch, thank you so much.

**Ashly Burch:** Thank you! Thanks for having me.

**John Moe:** *I'm Happy You're Here* is available now on YouTube.

Hey, over on our show page we have some links to some fun Twin Cities things you can do with me this fall. My band, Math Emergency, plays its final show on September 21st. *Wits* returns to the Fitzgerald Theater on September 30<sup>th</sup>. And I'm teaching writing classes all fall long at the Loft Literary Center. Check those links.

Our show exists because people help pay for it. Shows like this one, like today's—you know, understanding the world a little bit better, understanding your mind, some ideas on how to make a better path in this life. We think that's worth funding. Hopefully you do too, because that's how we exist. Please go to [MaximumFun.org/join](https://MaximumFun.org/join) and find a level that works for you. Maybe it's 5 bucks a month, maybe it's 10 or 20. Whatever works for you. We would love to have you onboard. And if you've already joined, thank you. You know that the show just sounds a little bit better and a little more meaningful when you do.

Be sure to hit subscribe. Give us five stars. Write rave reviews. That gets the show out into the world.

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline can be reached in the US and Canada by calling or texting 988. It's free. It's available 24/7.

We're on BlueSky at [@DepreshMode](https://bsky.app/profile/depreshmode). Our Instagram is [@DepreshPod](https://www.instagram.com/depreshpod).

[00:50:00]

Our newsletter is on Substack. Search for *Depresh Mode* or John Moe there. I'm on BlueSky and Instagram at [@JohnMoe](https://www.instagram.com/depreshmode). Our Presbies group is on Facebook. A lot of good people

hanging out there, talking about their mental health, supporting each other, talking about the show. I'm over there too, and I'll see you over there.

Hi, credits listeners. Godzilla: also misunderstood. Mothra? Just trying to protect her island. I could do this all day.

*Depresh Mode* is made possible by your contributions. Our production team includes Raghu Manavalan, Kevin Ferguson, and me. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Rhett Miller wrote and performed our theme song, "Building Wings". *Depresh Mode* is a production of Maximum Fun and Poputchik. I'm John Moe. Bye now.

**Music:** "Building Wings" by Rhett Miller.

*I'm always falling off of cliffs, now*

*Building wings on the way down*

*I am figuring things out*

*Building wings, building wings, building wings*

*No one knows the reason*

*Maybe there's no reason*

*I just keep believing*

*No one knows the answer*

*Maybe there's no answer*

*I just keep on dancing*

*(Music fades out.)*

**Transition:** Cheerful ukulele chord.

**Speaker 1:** Maximum Fun.

**Speaker 2:** A worker-owned network.

**Speaker 3:** Of artist owned shows.

**Speaker 4:** Supported—

**Speaker 5:** —directly—

**Speaker 6:** —by you!