

Ep #2: Myths of Grief



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With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode two, Myths of Grief.

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, the only podcast that offers a proven process to help you work through your grief to grow, evolve, and create a future you can actually look forward to. Here's your host, certified life coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey everyone, welcome back to the podcast. I'm your host, Krista St-Germain. And today, I want to talk to you about some of the myths of grief. These are things that just keep coming up in the life coaching that I do with my *Widowed Mom* clients. Many of them, in fact, were myths that I also believed when my husband passed.

Unfortunately, as a culture, most of what we're taught about grief, which is very little, in fact, that we're actually taught, but most of what we have learned about grief isn't accurate. And it can cause us a lot of trouble. It can be very problematic when we aren't prepared or when we are misinformed and we have a significant loss, like the loss of a partner, spouse, husband and we're looking to receive support from those around us who are also misinformed, then we end up both unprepared to be the griever and surrounded by people who are unprepared to support us.

So I'd like to talk about six of the most common myths that I see and kind of right those wrongs that are out there. Before I do that, I'd also like to talk about generally grief. So when I'm talking about grief in the context of this podcast, I'm talking about the thoughts and feelings, the normal natural response to loss, and in this case, death.

Now, of course, we grieve as humans for many different losses. But in the context of this podcast, we're specifically talking about the loss of our husband; death of a partner. The most common and prevalent myth that I hear and that I think I find the most frustrating and perhaps my biggest pet

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peeve is the idea that there are five stages of grief that we should go through.

So the book *On Death and Dying* was written by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross. And her work was pioneering, but it really wasn't about death. Kübler-Ross's work was actually about people who had terminal illnesses, people who were dying themselves. And so, if you have ever heard of the stages, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, then you're familiar with her work.

But what perhaps you didn't know was that this work really didn't have anything to do with those who are grieving the loss of an individual. And so often, clients will come to me or I will talk with widows in my Facebook group or wherever and they will be evaluating or trying to measure their progress based on where they think they are in these five stages that have nothing to do with grief.

So they will wonder and judge themselves, "Is there something wrong with me because I'm not angry or I wasn't angry?" Or, "Is it okay that I really never went through this phase of bargaining?" Or, "What does it mean that I'm not accepting or I have accepted the loss?" And we create unnecessary confusion because we don't know that these stages really have nothing to do with the process of grieving.

So that's myth number one; if you're trying to measure stages, don't. In future podcasts, we will talk about other ways that we think about the process of grieving, other tasks that we are wise to accomplish as we grieve, but for sure, please drop any thoughts you've had about stages of grief, specifically those five that I referenced.

Myth number two is that we just need to give it time, that somehow time heals all. And we have all kinds of thoughts about time; most of them not very useful. I can't tell you how many widows I have spoken with who were

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very surprised to learn that once they got through the first year after their loss, that a switch didn't just flip.

Many of them expected that, because they were told, that once they got through the first year, made it through the first milestones, that somehow the second year would be better, that somehow, when they turned the corner of year two, they would expect to feel different. And they were very disappointed to realize that that isn't what happens necessarily.

Now, for some people, the second year is so much easier than the first, but for many, it isn't. But time in and of itself isn't what is responsible for healing. And so, when we avoid our emotions, when we avoid processing and talking, when we avoid the idea that anything has happened or when we try to bury what we're feeling and just go with time, sometimes we're really disappointed that time didn't actually take away the pain.

That's not what happens. It doesn't work that way. So that's myth number two; give it time, that time heals. It really isn't the amount of time that passes as much as it is what we choose to do with that time.

The third myth I see a lot is that we should grieve alone. And we hear this – when we're little we start hearing this, that if you're going to cry at the dinner table, you should go to your room. If you're going to cry, cry alone. Laugh and the world laughs with you, cry and you cry alone.

This is something, as a society, that we seem to think that people who are sad need to be left alone. And because we're told this and because we tell ourselves this, what it means often is that, as grieving humans, we isolate. And there's nothing wrong with spending time by yourself. There's nothing wrong with introspection. There's nothing wrong with alone time. But often, what we need when we're grieving is support and love and understanding from other humans.

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And so isolation doesn't take us closer to that. It takes us much farther away. So grieving alone is not an accurate or useful concept when it comes to grief.

The fourth one I hear regularly, and especially – gosh, if I could imagine how many times I was told this at the funeral, at my husband's funeral, that we should be strong for others, especially as moms, that we should be strong for our children. And sometimes, we have our children being told this by well-meaning people, that you should be strong for mommy, you're the man of the house, you just need to be strong. And this is not helpful at all.

What are we really saying when we say be strong? We're saying that whatever you feel is invalid. We're saying that you should just bury whatever you feel, hide it, fake it. No, whatever you're feeling is fine. Whatever your children are feeling is fine. If you're hiding your grief, if you're hiding your sadness, your thoughts, then the message that you're sending to others, and specifically your children, is that they should do the same, that they should hide and be strong because inherently there's something wrong with showing emotion, and that couldn't be further from the truth.

Pain is the natural response to loss. Grief is the natural response to loss. And with it comes a rollercoaster of emotions, most of which don't look like being strong. So let's stop telling ourselves that we need to be strong for others and let's start being honest about what we're thinking and what we're feeling. And by doing so, let's support one another as we grieve. So that's myth number four.

Myth number five, again, if I had a nickel... Keep busy. How many times have you told yourself or has someone told you, "Oh, dear, just keep busy?" Just keep busy because, again, time will heal. If you just keep busy then somehow busyness will prevent you from feeling all of the pain.

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And this also couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, in my experience, being busy actually just creates eventually more pain. It just helps us suppress what it is that we're feeling. And what we resist persists. What we resist, we create more of. So when we don't allow the emotions of grief, when we try and busy ourselves or distract ourselves – which, by the way, can come from lots of places, not just keeping busy, per se. It can be busy. It can be overworking. But it could also be other distractions.

It can be over-shopping, it can be overeating, it can be overdrinking. It can be anything that takes us away from feeling the emotions that are associated with our loss. But I will promise you that the only way through the emotions of grief is through. You can't go around them. You can't avoid them. You have to feel them. And no amount of busyness will ever take them away. They will wait for you. The emotions of grief will wait.

So it's important – and I'm going to talk about this in another podcast episode – it's important that we learn how to feel our emotions because busyness just won't do it. So when we busy ourselves, we just basically bury it under an avalanche of activity, but it's still there.

Now, one thing I would like to mention as it relates to keeping busy is this idea that actually is rather useful when talking about grief, which is that there is a balance to be found in keeping ourselves doing the work of grief, but also distracting from it in a way that allows our brain to process what's happening. And there's actually a name for it; it's called the immersion distraction principle.

And what it basically means is that doing the work of grief, talking about what's happened, processing things, coming to terms with things, feeling the feelings, be that through talking with a counselor or journaling, or there are a variety of ways to accomplish that work, but we can't do that work all the time. It's overwhelming to the part of our brain that is processing it. So

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we actually do want to attempt to find a balance of doing activities where we feel like we are in a zone.

So if you've ever been in a zone, you know what I mean, maybe you find the zone when you're doing yoga, or maybe gardening, or maybe it's painting or some sort of creative outlet that when you're doing it, time just passes and you aren't thinking hard about your loss or trying to process any of it. You're not trying to escape it necessarily, you're not fearful about doing the work of grief, but you're giving your brain a break from all of that work on occasion, and that is actually very valuable.

The sixth and final myth that I want to talk about is, gosh, it just feels so awful to even hear people say things to this end, but this is what society often tells us, that we shouldn't feel bad. "Don't feel bad, it will be okay, there's more fish in the sea, you're young, you'll find someone else," or "He's in a better place now. He's no longer suffering so don't feel bad," or, "At least you had him for a certain amount of time. At least you got to experience it, so don't feel bad."

I'm here to tell you that I want you to feel as bad as you need to feel for as long as you need to feel it. To tell yourself that you shouldn't feel bad when you feel bad is a recipe for disaster. If you're feeling bad, it's because you're having a normal response to loss. Feeling bad is a part of it. So please don't try to talk yourself out of feeling bad. And please don't listen to anyone else who's trying to talk you out of feeling bad. It isn't helpful to your healing and it's okay to feel bad. Feeling bad is part of it.

Can you imagine not feeling bad about this loss? Can you imagine how weird that would be if you didn't feel bad? I think most of us, if given the choice, I know for me, this is definitely the case – we don't want to feel good about our loss. We want to feel bad because feeling bad means that the relationship was significant. It means that it meant something to us. It means that we miss it, that we miss that person.

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And so the contrary, the opposite, would just be weird, and it isn't what we want. We want to feel bad. So don't ever judge yourself for feeling bad, don't ever tell yourself that you should be finding a silver lining or making lemonade out of lemons or any of that. Feel as bad as you feel for as long as you need to feel it, and that's the way to healing.

Alright, I hope this was useful to you. And if you like this podcast, if you think it's something that would be useful to other people, I would greatly appreciate if you would take a few minutes to rate and review it. And it's so important in the early days of a podcast to rate and especially to review a podcast so that it can be found by others.

And to give you a little bit of an incentive to do that, I am giving away five \$100 gift certificates to Amazon. To anyone who is willing to rate and review, your name will be entered into a drawing. There are rules, you can go to coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch and find all the details of how that works.

I would also love it if you would take time to share this podcast with anyone you think might benefit. This is exactly why I do this work and so your willingness to help get the word out about *The Widowed Mom Podcast* is appreciated more than I can even tell you.

Alright, my friends, I love you. I'm so glad that you listened to the podcast today. I will see you very soon with another episode. I love you. You've got this. See you next time, bye-bye.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *The Widowed Mom Podcast*. If you like what you've heard and want to learn more, head over to coachingwithkrista.com.