

Ep #4: The Widowed Mom's Bill of Rights



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With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode four, The Widowed Mom's Bill of Rights.

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.

Hello there and welcome to this episode of the podcast. I want to take a second and do a little listener shout out. So, Mary submitted a review and the title of it is Awesome. It reads, "Krista is intelligent and her information is extremely helpful and insightful. She really wants to help other widowed moms to be the best version of themselves. I'm so thankful I found her."

Mary, I am so thankful that you wrote that review and I'm so thankful that we've connected and that you have found the podcast helpful, so thank you for that. And then also, to a reviewer who calls herself LoveToCamp, "Ready to start option-B. I just finished listening to the first podcast from Krista and it was wonderful. She makes me believe that a great future is obtainable despite a great loss. I'm really looking forward to more podcasts. Thank you, Krista, for creating this podcast to help us navigate this journey."

You are so welcome. I love giving listener shout-outs, so if you submit a review, you just might hear your name and review on the podcast. Okay, let's jump into this week's topic.

I remember shortly after my husband died, I found something called The Griever's Bill of Rights in one of the grief books that I was reading. And I've seen variations on the theme in different websites, different books, but none of them have been specific to the experience of widowed moms. So in this episode, I want to share with you what I call The Widowed Mom's Bill of Rights.

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It's a list of 25 things that I hope you will remember when other people are telling you how to grieve or when you're questioning yourself, or when you're feeling particularly low or maybe asking that question, am I normal? Is this normal? Am I okay?

So let's jump in; The Widowed Mom's Bill of Rights, right number one. You have the right to a completely unique grief experience. The experience of losing your husband is unique to you. And although there may be similarities between the experiences of other women who have lost their husbands, your experience will be yours.

So attempting to fit into a mould is never going to serve you and putting a timeline on it isn't going to serve you. And comparing your grief experience with the grief experience of others isn't going to serve you. So you have the right to let your experience be as unique as your relationship was with your husband.

Right number two – you have the right to experience any and all emotions without judgment. And this really does include all of them; not just sadness and loneliness, but anger, rage, jealousy, betrayal, relief. And whether or not you experience all of them doesn't mean anything. But don't consider any emotion off the table and don't judge yourself for any emotion that you experience. You have the right to experience any and all emotions without judgment.

Number three – you have the right to talk about your husband, even if other people are uncomfortable when you do so. And whether his death is recent or years ago, talk about him as much or as little as you see fit. You are not responsible for the emotional experience of other people. If they are uncomfortable, it's because of what's going on in their mind.

You don't have magical powers, as much as I know we sometimes wish that we did, and therefore you can't control the thoughts and feelings of

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other people. It's not your job and it's not even possible to make those around you feel a certain way. Your job is to take care of your own thoughts, your own feelings, your own actions. That's all you can really control anyway. And let other people react how they will and know that it means nothing about you or your husband and everything about them and their own interpretations. So talk about your husband as much and as often as you want, even if other people are uncomfortable when you do it.

Number four – you have the right to not know what you want, to ask for help anyway, and to change your mind regularly. For most of us, we are in completely new territory. And well-meaning people will offer to help us and we may have no idea what we actually need or want. And chances are, neither do the people who love us, so it's okay to not know and it's okay instead to figure it out along the way.

And this isn't limited to those of us who are in acute or early grief. This bill of rights, and this one as well, applies no matter when you lost your husband. It's okay to be honest with the people around you as you navigate this new territory and to communicate your desires as you go, knowing that they will change. Sometimes, you'll want someone to call you and check on you or come sit with you, and other times, you may just want to be alone. Sometimes, you may want help with the kids. Other times, you may want your own space together as a family. And you may change your mind 37 times about all of it, and that's okay. You have the right to not know what you want, to ask for help anyway, and to change your mind regularly.

Number five – you have the right to change your self-care habits. Maybe before your husband died, you were the type of person who exercised regularly or ate healthy all the time, and now you notice that you're not exercising at all or as much, and maybe you aren't cooking the way that you used to cook and instead you're eating all of the foods that people have brought to you. Or maybe you're past the stage that people have

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brought you food, and now you're eating out and doing fast food more often.

Maybe you are the type of person who used to meditate regularly or do yoga regularly, and those things aren't happening right now for you. Cut yourself some slack. You can get back to those things eventually. Just because you aren't doing them now doesn't mean you'll never do them again.

It's okay to be in transition, it's okay to change your habits and adjust them as you go. I remember, about eight weeks after Hugo died, I decided, because I'd never been the type of person who would go and get massages, I decided to buy myself a monthly massage. It was a big deal for me. But I'd missed the human touch. The stress relief was good for me. And so I changed my self-care habits.

I spent more time journaling than I ever had before because it felt good to me. I allowed myself to sit out on the porch and drink a cup of coffee and watch the sunrise and sit there for a couple of hours if I needed to and take care of myself. I allowed myself to tune into what I was needing emotionally and meet my own needs as best as I could. I allowed myself to go to therapy and talk about it with a therapist. I allowed myself, eventually, to invest in coaching when I learned about it and found something that worked for me.

And for a while – gosh, I won't even say a while. A long time – it took a while for me to get back to regular exercise. I ate comfort foods for a long time. So cut yourself some slack. Figure out what it is that would be useful to you in terms of self-care. And I don't just mean massages and pedicures. I mean taking time to do the work needed to support yourself in your healing, in whatever way that is for you. You have the right to define that for yourself. You have the right to change the standing self-care habits that

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you had, delete some, add some. It's all going to change and evolve as you heal, and that's all okay.

Number six – you have the right to not feel your feelings. Now, I'm always going to tell you that, at some point, feeling your feelings is going to be the fastest path to healing. But sometimes, you might not want to feel your feelings. You might not be up to it. And that's okay. You get to decide.

Sometimes, you might just make a list of the feelings you know are there, put them in a journal, come back to them when you're ready. It's up to you to decide when you want to feel your feelings.

Number seven – you have the right to make mistakes, to adjust your standards and to fall completely short of them. You are human. We all make mistakes. And somehow, when we get into this next chapter of live and when we're grieving, I see my clients setting standards that are so unreasonably high for themselves and then not giving themselves permission to fall short of those incredibly high standards.

You have the right to adjust those standards as you see fit, to fall terribly short of them and to not make it mean anything has gone wrong, to not make it mean that anything is wrong with you. You have the right to make mistakes. Sometimes, you will probably yell or snap at your kids. Sometimes you will make a decision that you wish you hadn't made. Sometimes, you will say something you wish you hadn't said. Sometimes, with perspective, you will look back on something and think, "Oh, I wish I would have done that differently."

Of course, we wish we would have done things differently. Hindsight is 20-20, right, we hear that all the time. But we have the right to make mistakes. So when you make mistakes, be gentle on yourself.

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Number eight – you have the right to keep or not keep any and all of your husband's belongings for as long as you choose. And I know that there will be many people in your life that have lots of opinions about what you should keep, what you shouldn't keep, how long you should keep it for, should you donate it, should you sell it, should you save it for your children?

Listen, you get to decide. There is no right, there is no wrong, and it's okay for other people to have their opinions. But what really matters is what's right for you, and only you know that. So you have the right to keep or not keep any and all mementos and belongings, and of his stuff, for as long as you choose in whatever way you choose.

Number nine – I get asked about this one all the time. You have the right to wear or not wear your wedding ring. It is your ring. So often, clients come to me and they are judging themselves based on how they feel about a ring. If you want to wear the wedding ring for the rest of your life, you can.

If you want to take it off the day after your husband dies, you can. If you want to move it to your right hand, you can. If you want to take that jewelry and have it made into something else, maybe a necklace or earrings or something else because it's what you want, you get to do that. Other people will have opinions about what it means, that you decide to wear your ring or not wear your ring, or for how long you decide to do it. But ultimately, the only person's opinion that matters is yours. So do what feels right to you with that wedding ring.

Number 10 – you have the right to use the term widow, to declare yourself single, or to continue to identify as married for as long as you see fit. And this includes how you think of yourself in your own mind, and also how you express yourself outwardly.

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If you want to change your Facebook status to widowed, it's okay. If you want to change it to single, that's fine. If you don't want to do anything with it, that's fine too. There is no right or wrong. You have the right to do whatever it is you want to define yourself and your marital status in whatever way feels right to you in your life.

Number 11 – you have the right to do what you believe is best for your children, even when others give you advice to the contrary. Of course, people are going to be concerned for your children, but ultimately, you are their mother. You get to decide what is best for them and what is best for your family, and chances are, you know them better than anyone on the planet. And if you want to seek advice from trusted friends or mental health professionals or organizations or grief experts, do it. But you are the one that gets to decide what is best for your children.

Number 12 – you have the right to be honest and not try to hide or fake your emotions in order to prevent others from feeling uncomfortable around you. Going back to right number three, you are not responsible for the feelings of other people. Emotions are not contagious. Your emotions don't cause another person to feel anything. It's their thoughts that cause that for them and you can't control their thoughts, therefore you can't control their reactions. And conversely, you also have the right to decide who you want to be honest with, and if you want to fake it in the interest of avoiding a conversation that you don't wish to have, that's okay too.

Number 13 – you have the right to be comforted or not be comforted by clichés and platitudes. The thing about beliefs is that only you know what beliefs serve you. And what's right for you may not be what's right for another person. So, if the idea that your husband is in a better place, if that feels good to you then it's okay to find solace in that. If that thought makes you angry, that's okay too.

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If the idea of finding the gifts in grief feels hopeful to you then keep thinking it. If it makes you want to punch someone or something, then it's probably not for you, and that's okay. If you like the thought that everything happens for a reason, then that thought works for you.

I remember hearing it and feeling completely lonely and isolated and misunderstood. It didn't work for me. Only you know what beliefs serve you, and so you get to decide if something is comforting or not. Keep what works for you and dismiss the rest.

Number 14 – you have the right to not move on, to not get over it, and to not be strong. Other people have so many opinions and so much advice. Accept what works for you; dismiss what doesn't. I do believe most people are well-meaning, no matter how off base or poorly worded or awkward their responses might be. But if I had a nickel for every time a client told me a story about someone in their lives who told them that they should move on already or get over it for god's sake or be strong – you get the idea.

You don't have to move on. You don't have to get over it. You don't have to be strong. You just be what you are and experience what you're experiencing and let those other people keep their opinions and advice.

Number 15 – you have the right to date or not on the timeline that feels right to you, regardless of what others say about your decision. In future episodes, we'll talk about how to know when dating is right for you and what questions you might ask yourself. I'll help you make sure you like your reasons for the choices you're making.

But for sure, people are going to have different opinions on what you should and shouldn't do, especially when it comes to dating. And this includes your family, your friends, your coworkers, your children. But it's not your job to get their approval or their validation about decisions you make. It's your job to make decisions that are best for you and to like your

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reasons. You have the right to date or not on the timeline that feels right to you, regardless of whether other people agree with your decision.

Number 16 – you have the right to embrace your spirituality or to question it, or both. I have coached a lot of women on their thoughts about their spirituality, their judgments about their spirituality, their beliefs after their husband dies. And what I want to tell you is that questioning your spirituality is completely normal.

And of course, it makes sense that when we lose our husband, we're going to be asking why. We're trying to make sense of it. It's okay to be angry. It's okay to be angry with God, if that is your belief, or with whatever entity you believe in. It's okay to question all of it. It doesn't mean anything about you. It doesn't mean anything about your progress. It doesn't mean anything about your future.

And I've often seen people cut themselves out of their own faith experiences, their own faith traditions, because they're having doubts and then, instead of letting those doubts be a normal part of the process, they judge them and they judge themselves for having doubts and they tell themselves that they are bad at practicing whatever their faith is, and then they pull away from it and they don't get the support that would benefit them in that moment. So you have the right to fully embrace your spirituality. You have the right to completely question it. You have the right to do both of those things.

Right number 17 – you have the right to express your thoughts and feelings in whatever way feels good to you, whether it's private, maybe it's journaling, small groups, talking with trusted friends, screaming, kickboxing, art. However you want to express your thoughts and feelings is healthy and perfect for you and you get to decide what that looks like and what feels best to you.

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Number 18 – you have the right to decide how and with whom you spend your time. If you want, you can say no to family traditions. You can say no to well-meaning people who you don't really want to spend time with. You can reinvent how you spend your holidays based on what you think is best for you. And you can do it unapologetically.

Number 19 – you have the right to not judge your abilities, progress, or potential based on your actions. I just coached a client this week. Her husband died on a trip. They were abroad and her husband died on this trip.

So, in her effort to prove to herself that she was okay, she scheduled a trip abroad. And at the last minute, it was too much and she canceled it. And instead of having her own back, instead of showing compassion to herself, her immediate response was to shame herself, was to make canceling that trip mean that she wasn't okay, that she wasn't headed in the right direction, that's he wasn't going to be okay without her husband.

You have the right to not do that. Don't judge your abilities or your progress or your potential based on what you are or aren't doing. None of that is relevant. Expect that they types of things you'll be doing are different from the types of things that you were doing before. You're grieving and it's okay. And the actions that you take don't have anything to do with what you do or don't get to believe about where you are in your grief, what you're capable of, or what you're going to be able to create in the future. They are different.

Number 20 – you have the right to experience joy and laughter in your life, even while grieving. So many times, we judge ourselves, we laugh, and then we feel guilty. We can laugh, it's okay. Laughter is healthy. If we could all find something that made us laugh or smile, what a gift it would be to give ourselves. It doesn't mean anything about your love for your husband

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if you find joy. It doesn't mean you didn't love him. It doesn't mean you don't miss him. Laughter and joy are okay, even in grief.

21 – you have the right to remember your husband and celebrate his life. And I encourage you to do that as often and as much as possible, as often and as much as feels good to you. Celebrate him in a way that brings you joy. Celebrate him in a way that makes you and your children fondly remember him.

I love it when people talk about my husband. And I love telling stories about him, I love reminiscing about him. I love remembering him because it makes me happy, and you have the right to do that. Remember him, celebrate him in whatever way feels good to you. Maybe you create new traditions. Maybe Father's Day becomes a day that you celebrate him.

And by the way, it's okay if you don't. It's okay if you don't celebrate Father's Day at all. There's no right or wrong, but you have the right to do it as you see fit.

Number 22 – you have the right to pursue people, places, experiences, and situations that will help you as you heal. Only you know what is helping you as you heal. And I've talked to many women who wanted to do therapy or counseling and met with someone, it wasn't a good fit, and so they never went back or they gave up.

Listen, this is your grief. You are responsible for your healing. You are the customer in this experience, so you get to try as many things as you want and quit as many things as you want if they aren't working for you and keep going and keep searching and keep looking for what does work for you until you find it.

Number 23 – you have a right to carry on your relationship with] your husband, even after his death. And this may sound a little strange to you,

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but really, it's not when you think about it because your relationship with him is really just a product of your thoughts and feelings toward him. And no one can take that from you.

Even the fact that he is no longer physically present cannot take your thoughts and feelings away from you. And of course, it's different when you can't hear him speak back to you, but it's completely healthy to talk to him, to write to him, to think of him, to laugh about things with him that he would laugh about and to keep that relationship going, even after his death.

Right number 24 – you have the right to end relationships with people you no longer want in your life, not because they have any power over you, not because they can make you feel anything, but because it's your life and because you're in charge of how you choose to live it. I'll probably do an entire episode on this misconception that we have that other people can cause our feelings, that other people are somehow toxic.

For sure, you get to create your emotional state, other people don't have that power. They don't have the ability to make you feel inferior or to make you feel shameful or to make you feel unloved. But knowing that, you still don't have to have relationships with people that you don't want in your life. You're the boss of that and you can end any relationship at any time just because it's how you choose to live your life.

The last one, number 25 – you have the right to unapologetic and random grief bursts. I remember hearing that term and thinking that's exactly what it feels like, a grief burst. Because sometimes, it feels like you're doing fine and then emotions of grief just kind of jump out at you. Like they jump out at you around a corner and you completely don't expect it to happen. It's like, wham, something unexpected catches you off guard and you're right back in the negative emotion.

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Maybe you smell something that reminds you of him or you drive by a place that had some meaning and you remember it or maybe you're at the doctor's office and you're filling out the form and you see the word widow or they ask you if your emergency contacts are current and you have to tell them. Or maybe it's a song on the radio.

So when those grief bursts happen, when all of a sudden, you were feeling okay and now you're not, resist the urge to judge yourself. Resist the urge to judge your progress when this happens. Let yourself feel what you feel. Cry if you want to and don't make it mean that there's something wrong with you or you're healing.

Grief is messy. It is not linear. It sometimes feels like two steps forward and three steps back. We want it to be this nice linear progression, that if we just do certain things, that then all of a sudden we won't feel all of the feelings. That isn't the way that it works. I think it's really better to think of it, instead of a straight line, it's a tangled jumbled up messy knot. And even though it doesn't feel like progress, even though we get these random bursts of grief, that's all part and parcel. That's all the way of it.

So I hope these are useful to you, and the next time you're inclined to judge yourself, the next time you are offered some unsolicited advice by mostly well-meaning people, the next time you're really questioning where you are, I hope you'll come back and listen to this episode and remind yourself of the bill of rights that you, as a widowed mom, have.

So I love you. I hope you have an amazing day. And I want you to remember, you've got this. If you're enjoying *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, I would love it if you would take just a couple of minutes to rate and review the podcast.

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coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch and you will find the instructions as well as the rules for a fun contest that I'm running. I'm giving away five \$100 Amazon gift certificates and you could be a winner.

I would love to hear what you think of the podcast. I would love, of course, a five-star review, and I would love it even more if you would share this podcast with someone who you think would benefit. Thanks so much. I'll see you in the next episode.

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.