

## Ep #9: Pain Vs. Suffering



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Krista St-Germain**

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode nine, Pain versus Suffering.

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 there. Welcome back to the podcast. In my world these days, I am knee deep in preparation for Heather's Camp, which you've heard me talk about before. By the time you actually hear this episode, we will have just probably come back from camp. But I'm getting ready for it, we've got some fantastic kids and volunteers lined up to come, and we are planning just the normal sorts of summer camp experiences that all children deserve to have.

So we're going to do archery and horseback riding and canoeing and kayaking and crafts and all of those things, and all the kids who attend are children who are also blind or visually impaired. So that's what's going on in my world, but I'm taking a break from Heather's Camp prep to bring this episode of the podcast to you.

And before we jump into the topic of pain versus suffering, which gosh, given the title, I'm sure you're so excited to hear about, but before we do that, I want to give away one of those five \$100 gift cards to Amazon because I've been talking about it for a few episodes now and you guys have been submitting your podcast reviews, which is how you qualify to win.

And so today, I found a random number generator on the internet and all of your names, those of you who have submitted your names and reviews are in a little spreadsheet that my amazing assistant put together and I just

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used that number generator and I came out with the winner, and her name is Amy Vanvels.

So Amy, thank you so much for your review. Amy wrote, "Her voice is calming and her information is informative. It's easy to stuff down the difficult feelings and try to avoid feeling them. She gives some great suggestions for how to deal with your difficult feelings." So Amy, thank you so much for submitting a review. We will be in touch. We will get that gift card to you shortly.

And for the rest of you, if you like the podcast, if you think it's useful, if you think it would help other people, I would love it if you would take just a couple of seconds to rate and especially to review the podcast. And if you would like to get in on one of the remaining four Amazon gift cards, then you can go to [coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch](https://coachingwithkrista.com/podcastlaunch). That's where you'll find the whole process of what you need to do to get a chance at one of those gift certificates.

Okay, so let's talk about pain versus suffering. Now, sometimes people think that pain and suffering are the same thing. I'm going to teach you that they are not. And when I'm talking about pain, for the purposes of this episode, I'm going to include both physical pain and emotional pain because I think both apply to what I want to teach you about pain versus suffering, and that is most simply that pain is a part of our human experience. Suffering is not.

Pain is not optional. It's going to be something that happens to us as humans during our lifetime on the planet by design. But suffering is something that we create on accident. And so I want to talk about what that looks like, how to recognize it, why it happens, and what you can do about it.

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So first of all, I submit that pain really is a part of the human experience by design. We didn't come to this planet to have rainbows and fairies and daisies and unicorns and kittens all the time. And I think some of us grew up thinking, we had this romanticized version of what our adult life would be like, but honestly, I don't believe that's why we're here.

I believe that pain and trial and tribulation and struggle and loss are all just as much a part of the human experience as their opposites, as happiness and ease and joy. If we didn't have all of that, it would be a little bit boring to be on the planet. We wouldn't be learning anything, we wouldn't be growing. We wouldn't have any context. If we were just happy all the time, eventually it wouldn't mean anything.

So we need the contrast in our human experience, so pain, both physical and emotional are part and parcel of what it's like to be a human. Suffering, on the other hand is optional. Suffering is created with our thinking. Suffering is when we experience pain, emotional pain or physical pain and then we tell ourselves an awful and un-useful story about that pain.

Suffering is when we interpret something in a way that makes it harder on ourselves. So whenever we decide that we're never going to get through whatever we're going through, whenever we decide that it's our fault because we're going through it, whenever we judge something or someone, whenever we have thoughts like why me, or this is awful, or it's not fair, or it shouldn't be this way, or it shouldn't have happened this way, we create suffering.

What's true is that things happen in life, and those events or situations in life that happen and then because we're human we feel pain, that's to be expected. That's what the Buddhists call the first arrow, and I love this parable. The idea being that as humans, we have the tendency to judge what happens to us. We have the tendency to search for the reason as to why the thing happened that we're now experiencing pain about.

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Often we blame ourselves. We blame others, or something wrong with me. There's something wrong with the world. I'm unlovable, I'm not good enough, that shouldn't have happened, somehow it's my fault. And this is what causes the second arrow. The Buddhist parable says that the Buddha once asked a student if a person is struck by an arrow, is it painful? And the student replied it is. And the Buddha then asked, if the person is struck by a second arrow, is that even more painful? And the student replied it is.

The Buddha then explained in life, we cannot always control the first arrow. However, the second arrow is our reaction to the first. And with this second arrow comes the possibility of choice. So there are things in life that we can't control. We can make our experience though, both of physical pain and emotional pain better or worse, depending on how we choose to respond to it.

Said another way, we can think about how we feel in a way that makes us feel better or worse. For me, an example of suffering. So when my husband died, you've probably heard this story if you've listened to other episodes of the podcast, but he died trying to change a tire on my car after it had gone flat on the highway. And that event I experienced much pain from.

Suffering also came from my thoughts that I should have pulled up further on the highway, that I should have found a safer spot on the road, that I should have insisted that we call AAA, that I should have taken the car for maintenance before the trip, just to double check and make sure there wasn't anything wrong with the tire.

All of those thoughts of how it was my fault, how I could have done something different caused my suffering. The pain of his death was inevitable. That was the first arrow. The second arrow I fired at myself. Not on purpose, but I did fire it at myself. Fortunately, it didn't take me too long to realize that that wasn't going to get me anywhere.

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So I teach you this not because I want you to judge yourself. The opposite. If you are suffering, it doesn't mean that you've done anything wrong. It doesn't mean that there's anything wrong with you. Suffering just means that we're caught in some habitual way of thinking or some unintentional way of thinking. We're telling ourselves stories without knowing that they're stories, without seeing that they're optional.

We don't know that we are taking our pain and with our brain, turning it into suffering and making it so much worse than it has to be. These are the types of things that I help my one-on-one coaching clients with all the time. Maybe you can recognize yourself in some of these situations. Maybe you have yelled or snapped at your kids and then turn around and made that mean that you're a terrible or unworthy parent.

Maybe you've experienced sadness about dealing with your husband's belongings, or something about your husband's affairs, and then you've made that sadness mean that you weren't progressing, or that you're stuck and that you should be farther along than you are. I've got a widowed mom client right now that I'm coaching with and she's going through a divorce in a marriage to a man that she married after her husband died, and she's experiencing a lot of pain in this divorce, and making it mean that she's failed and that there's something wrong with her.

Now, it's possible to go through divorce without experiencing pain. I suppose if you were the one who wanted it, but most people who go through divorce, especially when they didn't choose it experience a great deal of pain. But the optional part is the part where you beat yourself up and the part where you tell yourself there's something wrong with you or that it means something about you and your worth, or you and your future.

I've got another client who comes to mind who is very angry at her parents for things that have happened in her childhood and things that they did after her husband died, the way that they have treated her since. And that

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anger is pain, but what she's creating on top of it by judging herself for it, by telling herself that she should be able to let it go and she hasn't let it go and she should be the bigger person and she hasn't figured out how to forgive them yet, and she should be farther along and be able to take the high road, and shaming herself for all those things, that is suffering and that is the optional part.

Now, what do we do about it? How do we prevent the second arrow? First of all, I want to offer you that when you notice the second arrow, when you notice the suffering, you have to start by dropping the judgment, and specifically I'm talking about the self-judgment. You have to start by loving yourself no matter what.

Loving yourself no matter what thoughts you're having, loving yourself no matter what feelings you're having, loving yourself no matter what actions you are or are not taking. Loving yourself unconditionally. Showing kindness to yourself. Deciding that you are exactly where you are supposed to be is totally your option, and it's an option that feels so much better to us than deciding that we should be somewhere other than where we are, or we should be some more evolved or better version of ourselves.

No, that is not compassionate. That is not self-loving. So decide to love yourself first. And then recognize the second arrow when you notice it, and most often, that will be after the fact. That will be after you have already been hit by the arrow. But start there. Develop your awareness there. Notice how you're thinking about the pain that you're feeling. Notice the story, the optional part of the story that you are telling that's creating the suffering.

Notice where you're judging yourself, notice where you're judging others, notice any time the word should shows up in your story. Spot the pattern. Listen to the language that's happening in your own head. Things like you know, I'm a failure, this is awful, just my luck, of course this would happen

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to me, can't believe this happened, this always happens, who did this?  
What's going on here?

Any time you're cursing yourself, any time you're cursing someone else, that's the second arrow. And the reason it's so difficult is because it's so habitual. It's often something we don't give conscious thought to. It's just a product of patterning, and it happens so fast. And before we know it, we're telling ourselves a story that takes that normal pain response and makes it so much worse.

And then we feel worse, so then usually our commentary gets worse and we create a downward spiral where pain turns into suffering and suffering and more suffering. So be on the lookout for that second arrow. Be curious. Be interested. Not judgmental. Not mean. Be curious. Watch for it.

Sometimes you can say to yourself, I see you second arrow, I see you. You don't even have to change the story that you're telling about the pain that you're feeling. Just start by noticing it. Start by noticing that it is an optional story, a pattern. And then once you notice that it's there, without beating yourself up because it's there, and you say I see you second arrow, I see you, then you can get some leverage over it. Then you can start to tell a different story. One that makes your experience of the pain that is part of being human better, more palatable, instead of worse.

Alright, pain is a part of the human experience. Suffering is created by the stories we tell about what we're feeling. Suffering is optional. I hope this was helpful to you. As always, thanks so much for listening. I will see you next week with another episode. Remember, I love you. You've got this. See you soon. Take care.

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](http://coachingwithkrista.com).