

## Ep #24: Happier Holidays After Loss



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Krista St-Germain**

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 24, Happier Holidays After Loss.

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 to another episode of the podcast. Glad that you made it back again. I'm doing this episode a little bit earlier than maybe you might anticipate, but the reason is that I want you to be prepared for the holidays; as prepared as you can be.

And I know, so many times, in my coaching clients and all of the widows that I interact with in all of the various social medias, this is already starting to be on your mind and maybe be a source of stress and worry and concern. So we're just going to jump on in today and tackle the idea of how to be happier during the holidays after you've had a loss.

Before we do that, however, I want to do a listener review. I think you all know that my goal is to reach a million widows with this podcast. And the way that we do that is by making it more searchable, easier to find. So if you haven't left a review and you like the podcast, if it's actually making a difference for you, I would sure love it, as would other widows who maybe haven't found it yet, if you took a few minutes, especially in Apple Podcasts, and wrote a review.

The one I want to read to you today is from someone who calls herself Fabulous Moon Child, which I love. And the title of the review is Seven Years of Grieving.

She wrote, "Wow, only on the third episode and I feel like she is sitting with me, speaking to me. It's hard to find someone who gets it. Even my

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wonderful therapist doesn't get it as she has not lost a spouse. Krista is soothing my soul. I'm entering into my seventh year without my beloved husband and the journey has still been very painful. I've been in therapy, trying to find my way to peacefulness over my husband's suicide and I just feel stuck. Krista has pushed a button in me that has me listening up again. I can't wait to hear more of her insight; a must-have podcast for all widowed mommas or daddies."

That one makes my day, Miss Fabulous Moon Child, that you, you are exactly why I'm doing this podcast. So I'm glad that you have found some value in it.

Alright, let's talk about the holidays, shall we? The reason this is such an issue, I think, is that, in general in our culture, we put a lot of pressure on the holidays. We try to make everything perfect. We see examples of this everywhere, on social media, in all of the marketing that we see, all of the commercials. Everything is about happiness and meaning and tradition and memory-making.

And we see happy children by warm fireplaces with eggnog and presents and beautifully decorated Christmas trees and perfectly decorated cookies and holiday spreads that look pristine. And frankly, none of that is really reflective of what most of us have ever experienced in a holiday. But it is what we tend to compare ourselves to. It is the standard that we seem to be trying to attain.

So these unrealistic expectations, combined with loss, are often a recipe for misery. And whether it is your first holiday without your person or your 30<sup>th</sup> holiday without your person, you still might be having some stress or concern or worry about it.

If you haven't listened to episode 11 of the podcast on Deathiversaries, I would recommend it. However, holidays are a little bit different than

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Deathiversaries in that, when it comes to holidays, we usually have a long history of traditions and memories associated with those holidays. And our person was a major part of those traditions and those memories, whereas the Deathiversary, of course, comes with it some memories of the date that our partner passed and maybe the circumstances leading up to it, but we never experienced that date with our partner. We don't have happy memories of what that date was like, typically, and so it's a little unique.

Now, for some, that's not true. Some of us have double and triple whammies when it comes to Deathiversaries and holidays because sometimes they are at the same time of the year. For me, my husband's birthday is just a couple of days after Christmas, so I feel like it kind of piles up just a tad. But others actually lost their partner on a holiday or very near a holiday or had lots of holiday memories, perhaps, dealing with end-of-life circumstances.

So, for a variety of reasons, holidays can be tricky. Another thing is that, as moms, we tend to think that everyone's enjoyment of the holidays is our responsibility. We have unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We put a lot of added pressure on ourselves to create something that is perfect and somehow, we forget that we actually can't create other people's feelings. We cannot think their thoughts for them. We really can't make them have the holidays that we want them to have. And then, to make it all the more complex, of course, now we are looking so much toward the happiness of others and trying to create it for them and we're now doing it without our person.

I've also noticed that sometimes it sneaks up on people because we might be thinking, you know, maybe some time has elapsed. Maybe this will be your first holiday season without your spouse. Or maybe not. But sometimes, we go into the holiday season thinking, "I'm doing well, you know, I'm doing better than expected. People are telling me I'm doing well. I'm feeling a little bit stronger than I expected that I might," and then we can

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be quite surprised when, all of a sudden, how we were feeling is not at all how we are feeling. And we notice more sadness.

And then, as a result of that, we tend to make that mean something about our healing, or we make it mean something about our progress or about our potential. And then we tell ourselves that we aren't doing as well as we thought, and sometimes even catastrophize and start projecting onto future holidays and making it mean that, "Well, since I'm not doing as well as I thought with this one, that maybe the holidays will always be tainted, Maybe they will never be joyful again. Maybe it's just always going to be a time of year that I no longer look forward to.

And there are a lot of things that can really catch us off-guard that we don't even know to think about in advance. For instance, holiday cards. I've already seen it in my Facebook group this year where people are already starting to think, "How am I supposed to sign the holiday cards? Do I send holiday cards? Is that appropriate? Is that not appropriate? If I do send them, what do I say? Do I act like things are fine? Do I put on a happy face? Should I be honest and tell people I'm miserable and crying all the time? What do I do here?" So there are all these little things that we don't necessarily anticipate that can cause our experience of the holidays to be quite less than happy.

Before we jump into some of my suggestions and some of what I have to offer you, I want you to promise me that you won't take anything I say and use it as a weapon against yourself, okay? No shoulding on yourself. It's not a pretty thing to do, agreed? Okay, because I want to give you some suggestions, but what I know is that, as humans, we tend to often say, "Well, that person must know what they're talking about, so I guess I should do X, Y, or Z. I really should. I know, I know, I should be doing it so much different." And then we feel terrible.

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So the reason I'm talking about this has nothing to do with right or wrong ways to handle the holidays. There is nothing you should or shouldn't do. I'm just offering you options and I want you to consider what is best for you.

I also want to encourage you to have a no guilt policy. Whatever decisions you make about how you're going to spend the holidays, whether or not other people approve, disapprove, agree, disagree, whether you made one decision, you changed your mind, I want you to agree that you're not going to later make yourself feel guilty about what you decided, that if you aren't up to something – maybe a gathering or a tradition – that you say no and then you have your own back and you don't beat yourself up, you don't should on yourself, you don't make yourself feel guilty. Whatever it is you decide to do, no shoulding, no guilt, agreed?

Alright, when we go into the holidays, let's just agree in advance that it's not going to be easy, okay. Going into the holidays thinking that you should feel happy and you should feel grateful just makes you feel worse when you don't. So of course, you're going to feel sad. Humans do, especially humans who have had a loss.

Great love plus great loss equals great sadness. That's just the way of it. So let's not put on rose-colored glasses and tell ourselves that the holidays are just going to be happy, because when they aren't and we don't feel so happy, now we have created suffering. So let's go in knowing that we can make space for all of the feelings to be there, that we can allow ourselves to feel however we feel, that the most useful thing we can do when we have an intense emotion is to not argue with it, to not make ourselves feel bad because it's there, to not judge its presence, to just learn to allow it, and then it will pass on its own, and then we won't create additional negative emotions on top of it. We'll just allow the one that was originally there and we'll move on.

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Okay, I also want to offer that, as you go into the holidays, that you notice your brain wanting to offer you judgments, wanting to tell you that how you are behaving or how you are feeling or what you are thinking means something about you. I want you to resist the urge to judge your progress, to forecast your future life experiences based on how you're feeling this time of the year.

“Everything is derailing. I should be further along. This isn't getting better. This will never get better. I'm not doing it right. This is too hard. I can't do it.” None of that is useful to you.

Notice your brain wanting to offer those thoughts to you and just decide to talk to yourself more than you listen to yourself. Just decide that when you hear that critical voice, when you notice yourself forecasting future sadness, that you're going to talk to yourself in ways that are kind and loving, that you're going to encourage yourself and you're going to say, “It's okay, we're going to get through this. Yes, this is hard, we're going to handle it. Of course, this is hard, nothing's gone wrong here because this is hard.” We can feel hard emotions and keep moving forward.

I know the term self-care is a little cliché, and I think that's typically because when we think about self-care, we're usually thinking about bubble baths and pedicures and spas and things that feel fluffy and extra. But self-care is so much more than that.

And so I want to encourage you to go through your holidays with self-care top of mind. And here's what that can look like; give yourself permission to spend your holidays however you want. Give yourself permission to spend your holidays in whatever way feels right to you.

If you want to spend your holidays in your house, fine. If you want to spend them on vacation somewhere you've never been, fine. If you aren't up to

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going to his parents' house, it's okay. If you are used to cooking a huge meal and you don't want to, that's fine.

If you want to skip the decorations or dial them back or minimize the presence or slow down on the events. All of that is okay. Think through what you want your holidays to be like and make decisions that are best for you. That is self-care.

When you're having some emotions, be honest about that. If people ask you how you're feeling, you can tell them. Your feelings aren't contagious. I know often we're worried that we're going to bring other people down. We can't. It's impossible. We can have feelings and they can have thoughts about our feelings, but we can't actually bring them down.

And trying to not be honest because we're worried about bringing them down, guess what that does? It just brings us down and usually it creates more of a barrier and we aren't able to receive their love and support because we aren't being honest with them. So be honest about how you're feeling. Ask for help. And if someone offers help, even though it's hard sometimes to accept it, accept it.

Accept other people's help. Spend time with supportive people. You get to choose who you want to spend your holidays with. And it's okay if people don't agree. They might not. We can let them.

I want you to trust yourself and your ability to know what is best for you. Give yourself some flexibility. Give yourself permission to accept invitations tentatively, to change your mind at the last minute. If you're not up for something, say no.

If you said yes and later you don't feel like it, you're not up for it, don't go. You know what's best for you, trust that. Don't do anything out of obligation. That's what leads to resentment.

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Sometimes, the best way to take care of yourself is to do something that lifts up another. Interestingly enough, it's really not even because of them. And it's certainly not because you should. It's because it just feels good to give love to others. It feels good to us to serve others.

So if you can find the energy, I encourage you to consider random acts of kindness as part of your self-care. Volunteer somewhere. Donate something to charity. If you love baking, bake for someone. Do something unexpected.

It could be as simple as buying a present off the Angel Tree at your local mall. Maybe if you're feeling super energetic, you adopt a family and help make their Christmas amazing.

If you still have widow fog, write everything down, alright? If you're struggling with widow fog, this is especially important. It's easy enough to lose track of details without widow fog, but with it, holy cow. Write it all down.

I used to follow this woman – and she's still around and I love her so much. Her name is Marla Cilley and she goes by the name FlyLady. And FLY stands for finally love yourself. And I just think she's just a lovely inspiration.

And one of the things that she taught me to do a long time ago – and I mean, gosh, 15 years ago probably, was to pretend that a couple of weeks before the holidays you're going on a cruise. And use that date that you've made up in your mind as the date by which all of your holiday planning is completed. Because we tend to take up the amount of time we give ourselves for any particular task, meaning that if we give ourselves until the night before a holiday to get presents wrapped, we'll take up that time.

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If we create an arbitrary date a couple of weeks ahead and we decide that everything's going to be done by then, then we will have given ourselves a couple of weeks of calm. We will have given ourselves the ability to stay present those last couple of weeks, which is self-care.

The last thing on earth you need is to be up late the night before a holiday, wrapping presents completely exhausted, trying to assemble some complicated toy with instructions that aren't in English requiring some tool that your husband knew how to use or where it was and you don't and putting that kind of pressure on yourself.

So, I'm releasing this episode early enough that my hope is that you will consider pretending you're going on a cruise after early December. Maybe it's two weeks ahead of whatever Holidays you celebrate. Draw that line in the sand, not because you have to, but because you will be able to allow yourself to go through the couple of weeks before the holidays not feeling the last-minute pinch, able to stay present with whatever is going on for you.

And sometimes, that just means processing all of the emotions you didn't expect to feel, and now you have more bandwidth to handle that. So I want to encourage you to do that. I also notice that sometimes we don't take good care of ourselves financially during the holidays.

And, mommas, this can be hard. a lot of us tell ourselves that we need to spend more money on our kids because we need to make up for what has happened and try and give them a happier holiday by spending more money. And what I want to remind you is that you're normal when you're thinking these things, okay. Nothing's gone wrong here. But your children's joy doesn't really have much to do with the gifts that they receive.

It's the love that you give them that matters. It's the memories. It's the togetherness. I look back and I laugh. I think of some of the Christmases –

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because that's the holiday that we celebrate – where my children actually got tired of opening their presents and stopped in the middle of it. Because between me and their dad and all of the presents from grandparents, they got so many presents it actually exhausted them. It overwhelmed them. And so it was very clear for me to look back on those memories and see that that was not at all what it was about for them.

So watch your thought that you need to do something more or better for your children, whether they're little or big, or grown, that you need to do something more because they have been dealt a blow and you need to make up for it. You don't. You can't.

There is nothing you can do that makes up for the loss of a parent. You can love them. You can be with them. But it is not your job, nor is it even possible, to fill that hole. So please don't put that pressure on yourself.

Another thing we tend to overdo is food and alcohol. And so good self-care means knowing when you are turning toward a substance to try and numb out a feeling and being willing to tell yourself when enough is enough and allow yourself to feel those feeling and process them so you can find some relief without a substance, without a behavior, without a result that's even more negative than you would have had if you had just processed the feeling by itself.

Another thing we tend to forget – or maybe I don't know if we forget it as much as it is we judge ourselves – it's okay to feel joy. It's okay to be happy. I want you to remember this for yourself. I also want you to remind your children because, sometimes, we think and they think that we're supposed to be sad, that happiness is inappropriate, that happiness means they didn't love their dad enough.

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And we want to teach them that sadness and joy can coexist, and that being happy about the holidays doesn't mean we don't miss or love dad. That is self-care.

The last thing I want to leave you with is a question that you can ask yourself whenever you think you might not be taking as good care of yourself as you could. And that question is this; what would someone who takes amazing care of herself, who has the same life circumstances as I do, the same number of kids, the same amount of money, the same career, but she takes amazing care of herself, what would she do for herself right now? What would she do for herself tomorrow, this week, the whole holiday season?

What would someone who takes phenomenal care of herself so that she is living her best possible life and can take care of those around her, what would she do to take care of herself? And follow that intuition.

Maybe she would make sandwiches instead of a 12-course meal. Maybe she would say, "Thanks, but no thanks," to the invitation to the party she doesn't really want to go to. Maybe she would go volunteer somewhere because it feels really good to her to give back. Maybe she would sleep a little bit more and take care of her body. Maybe she would call up a friend and say, "Hey, I just need to talk," or maybe she would go to a grief group.

Maybe she wouldn't do any shopping in the mall because she didn't want to go to the mall. Maybe she would give herself permission to do all of her shopping on Amazon because she feels sad and overwhelmed when she goes to the mall. Maybe she would give herself a pass on holiday cards and just not do them this year. Maybe she would say no when somebody asked her to volunteer for the cookie exchange when she doesn't even like cookies, or have the energy to bake cookies.

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Maybe she would allow somebody to feel disappointed in her choice because she knew that she was making the choice that was best for her. Maybe she would catch her brain when it wanted to play the compare and despair game and she would decide to speak kindly to herself in that moment, when she was otherwise inclined to beat herself up.

These are the kinds of things that will make your holidays happier, easier, that will reduce suffering in your holidays. I'm not saying they won't be hard. Of course, make room for them to be hard. Make room for the emotions, all the emotions of the human experience that most of us have when we lose someone, to be there. Make room.

Your grief and your experience of the holidays will be just as unique as your loss. Not everyone in your world is going to experience the holidays the same way. Of course, they're not. They all had a different relationship to your partner. That's okay. So now is the time to take good care of yourself, to have your own back, to not should on yourself, to ditch the guilt and just stay present, as present as you can, even if what's going on for you is an emotion that you're not particularly excited to feel.

This is the way of it and you're doing great, even when you want to judge yourself and tell yourself you're not and you should be further along in your healing and other people are doing better than you, you're doing great. You hear me?

Okay, alright, let's get ready for those holidays. Let's be realistic. Let's not try to own everybody's happiness. Let's trust ourselves to do what's best for us, alright.

And of course, I record this a little bit in advance, so I'm not sure what's still open. I filled up the November group, my new Mom Goes On six-month group coaching program, but December might still have some spots available. I talked to somebody last week actually who joined the program

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and will be starting in December and she said, “Well, I should probably wait until after the holidays because, you know, the holidays are just really hard and they’re also kind of busy.”

And that is not a good reason to not start coaching. If the best time to start work like this, if it’s something that you want to do, is the time that you need the most support, when you would benefit from support, when it’s the hardest, when you feel like your brain is the messiest and your heart is the messiest, that’s the time to jump in and get extra support and get headed in the direction that you want to head in.

So if you’ve been contemplating it, I want to encourage you to just do it. Just apply and take the next step and let’s see if this program is a good fit for you because, in six months, you can be in a completely different place than you are right now; more confident, actually starting to design the life that you want instead of drifting through the life that you have. It’s work. It’s always work. But it’s work that’s worth doing.

So, if you’re interested, just go to [coachingwithkrista.com](http://coachingwithkrista.com) and you can click, “Request a consultation.” That will take you to a quick application form which you fill out and I review all of them personally, just to make sure, before we take the next step, that I think I can help you. And if I do, then we’ll hop on the phone and then we’ll see if it’s a good fit. And if it is, I’ll tell you all about it.

Alright, that’s it for this week. I want you to remember, all the way through the holidays, I love you and you’ve got this. Alright, see you next week, take care.

Ready to start building a future you can actually look forward to? Get a free copy of Krista’s Love Your Life Again Game Plan, and learn her three-step process so you can stop feeling stuck and start creating your next great

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chapter. No matter what you've been through, your past does not have to define what's possible in your future.

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