

Ep #26: The Truth About Overwhelm



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With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 26, The Truth About Overwhelm.

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, beautiful friends. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. So today, we're going to talk about overwhelm, everyone's favorite, I'm sure, definitely relatable. In fact, whenever people apply to my Mom Goes On group coaching program, one of the questions that I ask is for them to list the top three emotions that they notice the most often, and overwhelm is one of the ones I see all the time. So I have a feeling you're going to relate to what I talk about in this episode.

Before we jump in though, I want to read a listener review, as always. So this one is from Barbra, Barbra Rector. And Barbra wrote, "I'm recently a widowed mom of four adult children. Another listener, Tammy Brown, shared your podcast with our grief group that meets weekly at our church. I've only listened to one episode but felt like you were speaking directly to me. Thank you for giving me another tool in my arsenal of mourning tools."

You are so welcome, Barbra. Thank you for that review. And Tammy Brown, thanks so much for sharing the podcast with your grief group; I really appreciate that. If this podcast is valuable to you, here's what I want you to do; instead of doing your review today – although I won't kick you out if you do a review, that would still be great.

But what I would love is if this podcast is helping you, if you would share it with someone. Apple podcasts makes that really easy to do. Whenever you're listening to the podcast, you'll see three little dots in the lower right hand corner of your screen. And if you just click on those, there's an option

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to share. You can share through Facebook. You can share through Instagram. You can send someone a text or an email. It's super easy to share it in that way. Or do a little screen grab of the podcast. Tag me on Instagram @lifecoachkrista or on Facebook @coachingwithkrista.

Tag me and let the world know that this is a useful resource to you and maybe it would help them too. That's how we're going to help more people stop suffering so much as they grieve and heal.

Alright, okay, what I want to talk about today with overwhelm is why we feel it so often, what really causes it, because it might not be what you think, and some strategies that could help you feel less overwhelmed.

So, first of all, we need to acknowledge the physiological impacts of grief. I'll probably do an entire podcast episode on the impact of grief on the brain and on the body, but just for starters, we just need to acknowledge that, in many ways, when we have had a loss, our system is overwhelmed. Our capacity to process information can be diminished. It's like our brain is constantly buffering, right?

And I don't mean that in the way that I've taught buffering in the past. What I mean is kind of like that buffering symbol that you get when your computer is running slowly, our brain is doing that too. It's like buffering, buffering, buffering, and it can't process the same capacity of information that it could have been able to process before the loss.

So our brain can be overwhelmed. Our processing speed is diminished. Our ability to remember can be compromised, everything I talked about in the episode that I did on widow fog. We might not be sleeping as well. We might be swimming in all of the hormones of stress. This is just the reality of the physiological experience that most griever have.

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So, we need to cut ourselves some slack. We need to show ourselves some compassion and some understanding, we need to show our brains and our bodies some grace. And this is not the type of overwhelm that I want to talk about how we can change, okay.

Now, of course, there are - dietary changes can be significant, changes with exercise can really help. So there are things we can do to support ourselves physically. That's not what I'm interested so much in talking about on this episode because I think most of you probably already know that good nutrition is important. You probably already know that it's important to stay hydrated and get as much rest as you can, and that it's important to move your body.

So I'm going to assume that that's kind of your baseline information. And we're also though, not going to argue with the physical changes that we may be experiencing. We're not going to blame ourselves for them. We're just going to acknowledge that that can be, for many of us, the reality of the grief experience.

So what I want to focus this episode on is really more about the emotion of overwhelm. So there's the physiological aspects that we really can't do a whole lot about. They're already here. It is what it is. But then there are those moments where overwhelm is our predominant emotion and that's what I want to talk about.

This is the type of overwhelm that might surprise you. What we're typically thinking causes the emotion of overwhelm is that the circumstances of our lives have changed. That we're now filling the role of both parents, that we're running the house, we're earning the money, we're taking care of everything, that situations are coming and maybe holidays or events, family functions, death anniversaries, things are coming and we're expecting intense emotions.

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We have kids with a crazy schedule and conflicting events everywhere. We have children that need help with homework and they need to be fed. Maybe your children are grown and you have grandchildren. Your children want your support. Maybe you have teenagers and they're arguing with you and not particularly enjoying your parenting style.

Maybe things are breaking around the house that your husband would have fixed. And then other things are breaking, and then other things are breaking. Sometimes we have those weeks where it seems like the whole house just fell apart, and then the car went right along with it.

We think it's these things in our lives that are causing us to feel the emotion of overwhelm. We look at the garage. We look at his stuff. We look at our physical environment. And then we think that the state of those things, the number of boxes in the garage, the amount of stuff we still haven't sorted through in the closet, the pile of bills on the desk, the to-do list, we think those things are the reason we feel overwhelmed, which is problematic.

Because then guess what? The only way for us to get out of overwhelm is to deal with all of those things, to change all of those things. Some of those things might be in our control, but the lion's share of them aren't. The lion's share of those things are just the facts of life.

And as long as we think that those things need to change, before we can not feel overwhelmed, we're in a bit of a pickle. And this is why it's important to teach you and what I want you to know, that our thoughts cause our feelings. Not the things around us.

Now, I don't teach you that so that you will blame yourself when you feel overwhelmed. That is not the point at all. If I teach you that your thoughts cause your feelings and now all of a sudden you're thinking it's your fault and you just need to think better thoughts and there's something wrong

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with you, and now you're blaming yourself or shaming yourself, we're headed in the opposite direction of my intention.

The reason I want you to know that our thoughts cause our feelings is so that you can really start to see what your options are. You can start to see how powerful you are. You can start to see the path to reducing suffering in your life. And you don't feel like you have to control the entire world or change all the things so that you can feel better, because that won't serve you.

So what's really happening is it isn't the to-do list that makes us feel overwhelmed. It isn't the things that are breaking in the house or that broke last week that make us feel overwhelmed. It isn't the conflicting events that the kids have.

Those things don't have any power over us thankfully. Because if they did, we'd be in trouble, right? We'd have to have everything running perfectly so that we could feel good, and that's just not the way life works.

So the real reason we're feeling overwhelmed when things like that happen is because of the way that we're interpreting those things, because of the story that we're telling ourselves. The thoughts that we're having about it.

So when we're thinking, "I can't handle this, I'll never get it all done. It's too big. It's too much. I don't even know where to start," those interpretations of the things that are happening around us, some of which we can control but much of which we can't, that stuff is just the math.

You look at your garage. Some of you don't even want to look. I hear you. It's this out of sight, out of mind, last thing I really want to think about. But let's just take that as an example because it can be a tender spot for a lot of us. Maybe there's a whole bunch of stuff still in your garage that was

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your husband's. And when you look at it, we want to separate the math of that garage from the drama in our brain.

The math is that as it currently is, there are x number of boxes and y number of tools and we could take a picture of the garage. That's the reality, or whatever it is that you're thinking of that you feel overwhelmed about. That's the math.

That garage has no power over you. None. Everything in that garage just sits there. It doesn't cause feelings. Now, how do I know this? I know this because when I go into your garage, or if I saw pictures of your garage, I would have a different emotional experience of your garage than you do, because my thoughts about it are different.

That doesn't make me right and you wrong. That's just an example of how the human brain creates feelings with thoughts. So just notice that without thoughts, your garage and the boxes in it and the tools in it wouldn't create overwhelm for you. It just is what it is. It's our brain and it's unintentional, but well-intended thinking that creates our emotional experience of anything.

So I'm using the garage as the example, but I just want you to take a minute and think about where in your life, what's an area that right now you experience overwhelm when you think about. Or maybe it's an overwhelm that happened yesterday or the day before, or last week. What was that about? And can you separate the facts of that story from the story your brain is offering you?

Now again, we do this from a place of compassion and love. Not shame, not blame. That's just not helpful at all. Of course our brain is going to tell us a story that we can't handle it, that we can't get it all done, that it's too much, that we don't know where to start. That he needs to be here because we're out of our depth. We don't know what we're doing.

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Of course our brain is going to offer us those thoughts. It's not even important that our brain stops offering us those thoughts as much it is that we become aware of what our brain is offering us and we start to see it as thoughts.

Because when we can see it as sentences in our mind, when we can see it as the story our brain is telling us and we can separate what exists objectively versus what we're making it mean, then we can start to get our power back. Then we can start to go, oh, I see, okay. This garage can't overwhelm me. I don't need this garage to be different to feel better. This garage has no power over me, but these sentences in my brain that I believe are the only thing that really needs to change.

Maybe I can handle this. Maybe I could get this done. Maybe it isn't as big as I think. Maybe I do know where to start. Maybe I just need to set a timer and start with this box that's right here in front of me. Because what happens with overwhelm is that it just results in no action on our part.

When we feel overwhelmed as humans, we don't really do much. We get stuck. We spin around and we second-guess ourselves and we procrastinate. We make plans and then we don't follow through because when we go to do it, we're feeling overwhelmed. And as humans, we just don't take productive action when overwhelm is the emotion that's fueling us, and it's like a Catch 22.

I've taught you about cognitive bias. So we think the thought, I can't handle this, we feel overwhelmed, we don't even start, or we start and we stop, and then our brain uses that as evidence that yeah, you're right, you can't handle it. See? There's another thing you can't handle. Oh, look over here. See all those other things you can't handle?

And now we're really believing I can't handle it. It's too much, I'll never get it all done. We have all this evidence for it and until we stop and we step

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back and we go, hmm, what is the math here? Versus the drama that my brain is creating, thank you very much, and then we make some conscious choices about how we want to think.

And we choose our thoughts on purpose, knowing that our brain is going to offer us some doozies that really aren't all that useful. And then we're ready. I'm constantly on the lookout for when my brain says, "You don't have enough time. There's not enough time."

My brain wants to tell me that all the time. You'll never get it all done. It's too big, it's too much. Krista, you have bitten off more than you can chew. My brain loves telling me that. And I'm constantly having to redirect it, just like I would redirect a toddler.

Like yeah, I know, I know you want to tell me that it's too much and we've bitten off more than we can chew, but guess what? We're just going to get started. All we need to do is just do 15 minutes worth. It's probably not going to take as much time as we think. This is how I talk to myself.

Okay, so let's get into the practicality of it. So we've talked about overwhelm in the body and in the brain. We're not going to argue with that. It's just part of grief. We've talked about overwhelm as a feeling, which is caused by our thinking. That's where we want to focus our time and energy.

So here's how we do that. In the moment, we notice what we're feeling and we give it a name. This is overwhelm. We don't resist it. We don't try to push it away. We just name it. We claim it. We allow it. It's not going to hurt us. It's not a black hole that we're going to get sucked into and never come out of. It's just a feeling. We've had feelings that are much more intense than this one before, guaranteed.

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So feel the feeling. Name it. Open up to it. Witness it. This is what I've taught you in episode three. The now feeling process. If you notice you've got a really harsh inner critic here, we might want to get some coaching on that. We'll talk more about that in the future, handling an inner critic.

But notice it, name it, allow it. Remember, remind yourself, you're not alone here. Overwhelm is not just you. There's nothing wrong with you because you're feeling overwhelmed. Overwhelmed is a human experience. I guarantee you, it's an emotion that almost everybody listening to this podcast right now, especially widows, and I know a lot of people listen who aren't widows, they're very familiar with it.

So remind yourself that you're not alone. It's not that no one understands or that other people are farther along than you are in their grief and you're the only one that doesn't have it together. No, that's not true. Overwhelm is a shared experience between us all.

So then, you want to get curious and ask yourself, what's going on here? What am I thinking? What's causing this overwhelm? Because my brain wants to tell me it's the boxes. My brain wants to tell me it's the garage. My brain wants to tell me it's the to-do list or the homework or the things that have broken.

But that's not it. If it's my thoughts, what am I thinking? I'm thinking, I can't handle this, this is too much. See if you can isolate it. Tell yourself the truth. You don't have to do any of this stuff. You can walk away entirely from your life. Many people do. The truth is that's not what you want. That's why you keep waking up every day and showing up, even when you feel a hot mess.

The truth is that you are choosing to act, to carry on, to deal with all the things that break, to figure out what to do with all that stuff in the garage, to navigate all of these emotions that you're feeling, to figure out how to

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recreate your life and carry on and live the best one possible. That's the truth.

And just because something's on a to-do list doesn't mean you even need to choose to do it. To-do list zero is not a destination that anybody actually reaches. We do things, we add more things. We do things, we add more things. We don't ever get to the bottom. It's not the way life works.

So what on that list is the most important? Where do you want to focus your time and energy? What can you show yourself some grace on where you are trying to hold a super high standard that really isn't necessary and isn't helping you?

And then decide how you want to talk to yourself. Decide to talk to yourself like you would talk to a good friend, or to someone that you just loved so much. These are the things I say to myself. "All humans sometimes feel overwhelmed. I can handle overwhelm. All I need to do is the next thing on the list."

Sometimes it's even as basic as, "I'm safe, my kids are safe." Marie Forleo just came out with her book not too long ago, Everything is Figureoutable. Another woman that I follow, she's Australian. Her version of that is everything is workoutable. Either way, I love them both.

Krista, you're going to get through this. It's going to be okay. One foot in front of the other. Talk to yourself like you would talk to a good friend or someone you loved. Because the reality is that we're all going to think thoughts that make us feel overwhelmed and we want to be prepared for that.

Doesn't mean we've done anything wrong when that happens. It's just the way of our brain. Not a problem. We want to be ready for it. We want to have a strategy for it. When it shows up, what do we do? Who do we want

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to be? How do we want to talk to ourselves when we feel this overwhelmed feeling? How can we be our own cheerleader, our own ally, our own best advocate, our own champion when that happens?

Many of us notice that our brain wants to bring out the shame and the blame and the judgment and the comparison and it's okay that it does that. But we can make different choices. Just because our brain offers us junkie thoughts doesn't mean we have to keep thinking them. We can decide what we want to think so that we're supporting ourselves through all of this and providing some relief to ourselves.

We have that ability. None of that external stuff has to change for us to be able to improve our emotional experience of it. So that's what I want for you is less suffering. I want you to know how to support yourself when you're feeling overwhelmed. I want to give yourself a break.

Know that physiological changes might still be impacting you. That's okay. We're not going to argue with it, but we can control what thoughts we listen to in our brain and what thoughts we choose on purpose. And we can control our reaction to what it is that we feel so that we can create a different outcome for ourselves.

Alright, I hope you have an amazing week. I hope this was exactly what you needed to hear today, even though I know there's so many of you that listen that I've never met, I think about you all the time and I sit and think, what do you need today from me? What can I give you that would help you today?

So I hope this hit the spot for you. Alright, I love you, you've got this, and I'll 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

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process so you can stop feeling stuck and start creating your next great chapter. No matter what you've been through, your past does not have to define what's possible in your future.

Text the word PLAN to 1-858-widows-1, or visit coachingwithkrista.com/plan and get Krista's Love Your Life Again Game Plan delivered straight to your inbox. A future you love is still possible and you are worth it. Text the word PLAN to 1-858-widows-1, or visit coachingwithkrista.com/plan and get your free game plan today.