

Ep #35: Measuring Your Success as a Mom



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With Your Host

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 35, Measuring Your Success as a Mom.

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. Most of us don't measure ourselves as a mom in a way that's useful. Instead, we look at the way our children behave, the choices they make, the way they choose to show up in the world. And then we make it mean we did or didn't do a good job as a mom. So today, I want to debunk this measuring stick and offer you a new way to think about how to know if you're doing a good job as a mom.

First though, I want to give a listener shout-out to Wendy from PA. Wendy left me a lovely review on the podcast titled Love, Love, Love. And she wrote, "An absolutely wonderful podcast; honest and helpful. I lost my husband to cancer three and a half years ago. I have four daughters currently between 26 and 20 years old. I've felt like I've been one person doing the job of two. With this podcast, I realize I'm not alone. I'm still trying to figure out who I am now that my husband is gone. It's a journey, but one I know others have traveled. With the help of this podcast, it's given me hope. Thanks so much, from a faithful listener."

Wendy, thank you. You guys know this, every time you hear me read a podcast review, I love your reviews. They make my day. It really is like talking into my office walls when I do this podcast, so hearing from you and knowing that it is helping you in your life just is amazing to me. And it also is lovely because it helps other people find the podcast. So thank you, Wendy, for taking time to leave a review. I really appreciate it.

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Okay, so, let's jump into the topic at hand. So, measuring your success as a mom. I want to tell you about my two children, because I think, while your children may be very different from mine, you will relate to what I want to teach you if I tell you about how different my children are.

So, I have a 16-year-old daughter and I have a 12-year-old son. And while they are both amazing children, they are very different. My 16-year-old came out of the womb as an achiever. I didn't teach her this. I remember when she was four and she was writing her letters and she didn't like the way they looked and she got so mad that her letters weren't coming out the way she wanted them to and tore up the piece of paper and she was just very upset about her letters not being perfect.

And that kind of overachieving personality just is who she has been so far. If you want to leave the house at 5:30 in the morning, you just have to say, "Sweetie, I need you to be ready at 5:30," and the child is up the stairs, fully packed, sitting on the couch at 5:25 waiting on you. She gets straight As. There is no micromanaging of anything. She remembers whatever it is she needs to take, wherever it is she needs to go. And she's, like, no maintenance.

Then, there is the 12-year-old who, also very bright, not the same child. Not the same child at all. Same parent, right? Me. But this one requires a lot of, let's say, micromanaging. "Carson, put your shoes on. Carson, brush your teeth. Carson, have you taken a shower? Carson, did you change your clothes today? Carson, why aren't there more pairs of underwear in the dirty laundry? What is happening? Is your homework done?" All the little details, "Carson, put your iPad down."

So, I can tell him one thing, unlike his sister, he's just doing his own thing. They're very different children. Now, here's why I tell you this. What I notice in many of the moms that I work with is that we tend to measure our success as moms based on the behavior of our children. And this does not

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work. So, lesson number one for today is that success can't be measured by how our child behaves. It has to be measured by how we behave.

As much as we would like to – and if I had the secret formula for this, I would give it to you, but I don't – as much as we would like to control our children and determine how they behave and get them to follow our rules and get them to speak to us exactly the way we want them to speak to us and do everything we want them to do without ever being told. It just doesn't work.

We can't control our children. We can't control, really, other humans. And the reason is because they have their own thoughts and their own feelings. And those thoughts and those feelings are what drive their behaviors. And those behaviors are what create their results. So, we cannot control the way our children think, and therefore, we cannot control the way they feel. And so, we can't really control what they do or what they create in their own lives.

The only thing we can control, as moms, is how we parent them. The only thing we can control is how we show up when they behave in a certain way or when they create a particular result.

If we go about measuring our success as moms based on the behavior of our kids, we're always going to be trying to change their behavior. And unless you have the ability to surgically remove and re-implant thoughts into their brains, it's just not possible. It doesn't work. We just can't do it.

They are all individuals. They all have their own thoughts and their own ways of viewing the world and their own opinions and their own agency. And that's what makes it amazing to be a human. But it makes it really challenging to be a mom if we've decided that we can only be good parents if our children get particular results, we can only be good parents if our children don't vape, or we can only be good parents if our children don't

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drink alcohol, or if they aren't getting a certain GPA that we aren't doing our job.

Now, I'm not saying you can't have consequences for behaviors of what is acceptable in your house. That is absolutely what parenting is all about. But that is to focus on the parts that we can control. So, how do you know you're a good mom if your child isn't making the decisions that you wished they would make.

How do you know you're a good mom if your child isn't living life as you wish they would? That's the interesting question. And if you can free yourself from not measuring your success based on their choices, you'll actually be able to guide them better, to love them better, to support them better, to support yourself better.

If I were to get all upset every time I asked my son to do something and he spaced it off or didn't comply, I'd probably be upset a lot. And I wouldn't enjoy parenting him nearly as much. And it would just become this giant battle with him.

I wouldn't be having any fun. He wouldn't be having any fun. And that's not what I want for my life. So instead, I just choose to recognize that he's a different breed of cat. He's his own kid. He doesn't operate the way I do, and that's okay. I don't make his choices mean I'm doing a bad job. I just now how to talk to him and how to keep things moving in the right direction, without making it mean that he's disrespectful or without making it mean that I'm not doing a good job, or without making it a dramatic thing.

My kids are different, but I parent them with love. And at the end of the day, I look in the mirror and I decide that my success was based on how I chose to show up. I ask myself if I spent my time – as much as possible because nobody's perfect – if I spent my time engaging with my children as an

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emotional adult? Did I take full responsibility for the way that I feel? Did I take full responsibility for my thoughts, for my behaviors?

Even when I didn't like their behaviors, did I take responsibility for my reaction to them? Did I stay calm, even if they didn't? Did I enforce a consequence even when they weren't happy about it? Because emotional adulthood really just means we don't blame other people for the way that we think and feel or behave. And we don't need them to be different in order to control the way that we think, feel, and behave.

And so I know, at the end of the day, I've done a good job if I spent my time focused not on trying to control my children, but trying to set a good example, keep consistent rules, stay calm, enforce consequences where I have decided to do so, and not make their behaviors mean anything about me as a parent, not try to change their behaviors so that I can feel better about myself as a parent.

So that's lesson number one. We can't measure success by how our children behave. We have to measure our success as moms by how we behave, no matter how they're behaving. We have to control what we can control, which is us. And that makes us more effective, more loving, and frankly, more joyful moms.

Lesson two, this is a good one; we can't judge our parenting by how we feel. All moms, all of us, especially the widowed ones, we get angry sometimes. We get impatient sometimes, we doubt ourselves sometimes. Negative emotion is part of parenting, isn't it? Are you with me?

So, just because you feel a negative emotion, doesn't mean you're a bad mom. I have clients that I coach on this regularly that get mad at themselves because they felt angry towards their children or impatient or frustrated or annoyed. Sometimes, you just want to run away and lock

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yourself in the closet because you feel so overwhelmed and you just want nobody to talk to you.

And it's like that scene in – what's the movie? It's got Steve Carell in it and that lady from Saturday night live. They talk, they go out on a date. I forget what it's called, but they go out on a date and she talks about what she wants more than anything is just to be locked up in a hotel and have a sandwich and a Diet Coke and nobody interrupting her.

We all feel this way, all of us, sometimes. And that doesn't mean that we're doing a bad job as moms. That just means that we're human beings. Sometimes, parenting is challenging. And, of course, all of our emotions are caused by our thinking. You've heard me say that a million times. But that doesn't mean we're superhuman. That doesn't mean the point is that we now need to think thoughts that never produce a negative emotion.

No, of course we're going to feel challenged by our children. And of course, as widows and as moms, if we're doing it alone, chances are high that now we don't have anybody to share the parenting – although some of you never had someone to share the parenting even when your husband was alive, you were perhaps still doing it all by yourself.

But my point is, we need to give ourselves the space to be human beings and stop requiring perfection. I want you to give yourself permission to cut yourself some slack, okay. And here's how I know that you're a good mom. Here's how I know. Do you know how I know? You're listening to a podcast about measuring your success as a mom, okay.

If you're even interested in figuring out how to be a better mom, that tells me that you're already probably a pretty good one, right? The moms who aren't interested in being better moms, they're going to skip this podcast. So, can you please stop judging your parenting by how you feel. Let yourself experience negative emotion as a part of the human experience,

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especially as part of the widowed mom experience, and cut yourself some slack. That's lesson two.

Lesson three, I want you to retrain your brain to look for what is useful as a mom. We have, inherently, a negativity bias. Our brain is always on the lookout, in effort to try to protect us, it comes from a very good place, but our brain is always looking for things to worry about, things that are scary, things that have gone wrong. And it does the same thing in our parenting.

It's always looking for what isn't working, unless we consciously, purposefully retrain it to look for what is useful. And I think we can agree that looking for what we are doing wrong, quote unquote, as moms, isn't useful. Our brain is like a hunting dog. Give it a scent and it's going to go find what we're looking for, right?

So, if we tell it and ask questions, like why am I such a bad mom? Why can't I get this mom thing right? Why can't I be more patient? Why can't I actually enjoy time with my kids? Why can't I do this better? Why can't my parenting look like the parenting I see on Instagram and Facebook? If we ask ourselves negative questions, our brain is going to go find evidence to back them all up.

Our brain is going to go find evidence that we're right, that we aren't doing it right. So, what I want to ask you to do is retrain your brain to look for how you are doing it right. When you notice that little critical voice judging you as a mom and fault-finding, I want you to just pause, and then I want you to ask a different question; how is it possible I'm doing a better job as a mom than I think? How is it possible I'm actually doing amazing? How is it possible I could show myself more grace when it comes to the most challenging role I've ever had, which is a mom?

Pick a question; something that resonates with you. And when you notice that little critical voice, which is just your brain doing what brains do, I want

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you to ask it a question that you actually want the answer to, relevant to your parenting. “How am I amazing as a mom? What am I doing right? Show me, brain.”

And then you're going to retrain your brain to look for what is useful. And this is useful because when you're feeling better, more positive, when you're feeling proud, think about how you show up as a mom. When you're feeling self-doubt, you don't show up as a parent, the type of parent that you want to be.

You show up probably avoiding conflict with your kids. You probably, when you're feeling self-doubt, you don't tend to address behavior issues. You don't want to talk to them. You just kind of avoid. That's what I do when I'm feeling self-doubt. That's what most of us do. And so, when we're constantly letting our brains look for evidence of how we aren't doing a good job, then we're constantly generating self-doubt for ourselves, which changes the way that we parent, and not in a good way.

So, let's retrain our brains to look for what is useful, so we start feeling more confident as parents. We start feeling more proud of ourselves. We start feeling more encouraged. And that changes the way that we parent for the better. That helps us align with the type of parent that we really do want to be more often.

So, in summary, we cannot measure our success as moms based on how our children behave, because we aren't in charge of their thoughts and their feelings and their behaviors. We're only in charge of our own. So, we have to measure our success as moms by how we respond, by how we behave, by how we choose to think and feel and act, how we manage our mind, how we stay in emotional adulthood as much as possible.

We can't judge our parenting by how we feel. All human moms, especially the widowed ones, experience negative emotion. That doesn't mean we've

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done anything wrong. That doesn't mean there's anything wrong with us. It just means we're human. So let's not judge ourselves by negative emotion being present.

And number three, spend time retraining your brain to look for evidence of what you're doing right and how you are successful as a mom so that you can show up even better for yourself, for your kids, and at the end of the day, you look in the mirror and you tell yourself, "Good job. Good job, you. Way to go." We all have that option and we need to extend some grace to ourselves, cut ourselves some slack.

Alright, listen, I love you and I appreciate you. And if nobody else tells you today and if you can't tell it to yourself, I want you to know that you are doing an amazing job. This is hard, hard work. And I don't care if your kids are little or grown, it's still hard work. So, I'm proud of you. Keep going. You are knocking it out of the park, alright?

Okay, remember, 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 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.