

Ep #59: Response-Ability



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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 59, Response-Ability.

Welcome to the *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 truly look forward to. Here's your host, Master Certified Life Coach, grief expert, widow, and mom, Krista St-Germain.

Hey there. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. If this is your first time listening, I welcome you. I've always loved the idea that the word responsibility can be restated as the ability to choose our response. In other words, responsibility is also our response-ability; our ability to respond.

And so, today on the podcast, I want to share with you how you can apply this concept of response-ability to your life. And I want to share it with you in three very specific ways of life, so that you can create something that you truly love, even after loss, because that's what we're all about here on this podcast.

Before we jump into that, I do want to do a quick listener shoutout. And listen, I really appreciate it, if you have taken time to go and rate or review the podcast. It doesn't matter to me on what platform you did that, but I use Apple Podcasts, so that's the one I pay the most attention to. And I know what a difference it makes in helping people find the podcast.

So, I want to do a quick listener shoutout. This listener wrote a five-star review. Her name is Karen and she wrote, "This podcast has been an eye-opener. It's been 10 months since my husband died. I feel like there's so much pressure to do things right; being strong and supporting my son, showing everyone I'm fine. The Bill of Rights is permission to say it's not fine but I have this. I'm grateful that I found these podcasts. Love Karen."

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Karen, I'm so sorry for your loss. I'm glad the podcast is helping you. And you're right, it doesn't have to be fine, but you do have this. I promise you, you do.

So, a little bit about what's going on in my life. Some of you are on my email list, so you know these things before the podcast episodes come out, and I do record them a little bit ahead of time. But at the end of May – actually it's the last day of May, a young woman who I've known since she was, gosh, three or four, went missing.

And I wrote to you, if you're on my email list, you already know this, but I wrote to you to ask that you pray for her, send good vibes, you know, whatever your spiritual beliefs are, but just kept her in your thoughts that we could find her. And her mother passed in January of this year and, in the 13 months prior to that, she also lost her stepfather and her biological father.

And Savannah was visually impaired, just has been through so much in her life. And I've watched her through Heather's Camp, which is a camp for kids who are blind or visually impaired. She participated as our very youngest camper when we started the camp. And then grew up with us, graduated, became a counselor with us, a member of Delta Gamma, a very proud member of Delta Gamma, which is my sorority.

And she and her mother came to Hugo's service when he died. Just a wonderful, sweet human who went through so very much in a short period of time. And anyway, Savannah went missing and it took about two weeks before her body was found and it was found in a search party organized by members of her sorority and friends. And it's just been a little bit of a roller coaster.

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So, I don't tell you this to depress you. I tell you this to hopefully give you hope that, yes, you've already been through a loss. But listen, life keeps coming and the tools that I teach, I don't only teach them because we want to go back and deal with the things that have happened in our past and work through maybe whatever current loss that you're facing, loss of your spouse most likely, which is probably what brought you here, but knowing that these skills, especially the ability to process and allow feelings will serve you for the rest of your life and they are still serving me.

I teach this stuff every day, and in the last couple of weeks, I have done so much, just, allowing myself to feel what it is that I feel, not judging it, not resisting it, not trying to make it go away, but just giving myself permission to feel the feelings. Of course, they're caused by my thoughts, and that's okay. I can still, and you can still handle any feeling that comes your way, no matter what's happening.

So, with Savannah's loss, there were lots of thoughts and feelings as she was missing and as we were trying to find her. And then, of course, when we found her, and now still we don't have answers. We still don't know what happened and there's still a lot of thoughts that are causing uncertainty and not a lot of feelings of closure right now. And I'm still just making space for that.

So, if I can do it, you can do it. And I want you to learn these things, not only to get yourself through this loss, but I want you to learn these skills so that you have them for the rest of your life because they're important. Loss just keeps happening to us as humans. It's part of our human experience. And I want you to feel confident that you can navigate your own feelings and your own thoughts.

So, that's what's been going on in my world. I'm excited to talk to you thought, actually, about response-ability today. It's one of those concepts

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that I found so useful at many points in my life. I've always been interested in self-help and I go back and I think about the concept of response-ability. And I realize that it's probably been at least in my awareness for two decades.

I used to actually have it in my mission statement. I carried one of those Franklin Covey planners around and I was really into Franklin Covey's system and all of Steven Covey's books. And part of my personal mission, way before Hugo died, was to be a person who chose her response to every situation she encountered.

I saw the value in that teaching so long ago and it just continues to show itself to me. So today, we're going to talk about it in three very specific areas of life. I know you've probably heard me mention this quote before, if you've been listening to the podcast for a while.

But Viktor Frankl, who was an Austrian psychiatrist, he was a Holocaust survivor, he wrote many books – probably best-known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, which was based on his experience in Nazi concentration camps.

There is a quote of his that I have turned to so many times. And the quote is, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom." I'll read it to you just one more time, "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."

This fits in perfectly. Before we can exercise our response-ability, we have to understand that there's nothing in life that we don't have the ability to choose our response to. Nothing. There's nothing that can happen to us that we can't decide how we want to think and feel about.

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And the reason I love his quote so much is because being in a Nazi concentration camp, it doesn't get much worse than that. And to come out of that with the philosophy that there is always the ability to control our response, to me, is incredibly empowering.

Now, there are, of course, things that are out of our control. We know this. But there's still never a time where we don't have the ability to respond to those things in an intentional, purposeful, conscious way that aligns with who we want to be and the life that we want to create. So, whatever has happened or is happening can never take away our ability to respond to it in the way that we see fit.

I also love the simple way that Jack Canfield explains this same concept. Jack Canfield, if you're not familiar with him, is the author of many books, the most famous probably being the Chicken Soup for the Soul series. And he boils this teaching down to a simple equation.

And what he says is that S, plus R, equals O. Stimulus, plus response, equals outcome. S, plus R, equals O. Something happens, that's the stimulus. But the stimulus alone doesn't create the outcome. Something happens, the stimulus, and then there's our response. And it's the stimulus plus the response that determines the outcome, S, plus R, equals O.

And what Viktor Frankl says is that in between the S and the R, there's a space. And that space is our power. That's where we get to choose because we're always in charge of that response. We have the ability to choose it. we have the ability to respond.

But many of us don't know this. And we aren't aware of how powerful we are and that we can choose our response more often on purpose. And that's what I want to talk about today. And please don't think that I'm the exception to this. I know and I teach these principles, and yet there are

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many, many examples of times in my life where I am not consciously choosing my response either.

So, this is not about perfection. This is not me preaching at you from a high and mighty place. This is, again, me teaching you something that has bene of value to me and is of great value to my clients.

So, I want to talk about how to use response-ability, or the ability to respond, in three specific areas. It's applicable in many more than these three areas, but it's these three areas that I often see us not exercising our ability to respond. And if we could just get these three areas down, it would be a gamechanger.

So, these three areas that we want to exercise our ability to respond, our response-ability in are things that happened in the past, things that happened outside of us, and our feelings.

So, I want to talk first about things that have happened in the past. So, the most obvious example, of course, being the death of your partner. It happened. It's done. It's in the past. It's a circumstance now of your life. It is the stimulus. And how we respond to what has happened is within our control and makes all the difference in terms of where we steer our lives next, right?

Your response to the past will determine your outcome both in the present and in the future. So, we can decide to think that our partner's death or anything that has happened in the past, has the ability to forever limit our happiness. We can decide to think that our partner's death or anything that's happened in the past, you know, because we dreamt of a life together and it didn't work out we can decide to believe, we can let our response be to choose to not dream again and to decide to believe that there's no point in dreaming again.

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We can decide to think that because something happened in the past, like the loss of our partner, that we'll never love again. And I don't even want to tell you that these choices aren't valid. They're absolutely valid. Many widows make them. Many widows choose to stop dreaming. Many widows choose to not love again.

It's not right or wrong. It's not even good or bad. There's nothing moral about it. But what I want you to hear is that you are powerful enough to choose your response. And I just want you to do it on purpose. Because when it comes to things that have happened in the past, we can never go back. We can't change them.

And it doesn't matter nearly as much as we often think it does because even in the present moment, we get to choose our response and it's those two things combined, what has happened and how we respond, that ultimately create our outcome. So, no matter what has happened in the past, there is not a way that you have to respond to it. There is only a way you choose to respond to it.

And so, I know some of you are thinking sometimes that because he has died, that you have to feel sad, because he has died, that you shouldn't be happy, because he has died, that you aren't allowed to dream again, or don't want to risk dreaming again, or don't know how to dream again. We have lots of thoughts about what has happened.

What I want for you is for you to choose them on purpose. Choose the response that helps you create the outcome that you want. We can't control the stimulus. We can't control the past. But we do get to control how we choose to think about it, how we choose to show up even when, and ultimately, that's what creates our outcome. So, that's the first area, things that have happened in the past. We have the ability to choose our response to anything that has happened in the past.

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The second area that I want to talk about is things that happen outside of us. And by that, I mean interactions with other people, things other people say, things other people do, things that are just not happening within our person and therefore are not within our control. They're happening presently. They're not necessarily in the past. They could be right in front of us. But there aren't things that we actually can control.

In my coaching, I do a lot of work with widowed moms on their relationships. People in their lives that say the darndest things. Sometimes, coming from a place of love. Sometimes, who knows where they came from. But I think many of you probably have a person that you find to be challenging, someone with whom interactions, for you, can be difficult, things they say, things they do.

Maybe the things that happen outside of you that you find challenging are things that are happening in the world, that are far-removed from you. Maybe they're not even happening in your immediate family or with your kids or with your mother-in-law or with your boss. Maybe they're things that are happening in the world.

There are lots of them, especially in 2020. More than probably in most years, it seems, from where I sit anyway. So, those things can also be a stimulus, things people say, things people do. And we still always have the ability to choose our response.

Just because someone yells at us, doesn't mean we have to yell back. Just because someone yells at us, doesn't mean we have to even get upset. There are things that happen outside of us that we can't control. Yes, this is true. But we always get to exercise our ability to choose our response to whatever it is that we see in the world. There is no one and nothing that can take that away from us.

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So, I want you to know, first of all that you don't need to control the way that other people are showing up in your life, the way that things that are outside of your control are happening. You can't. You really can't. But I want you to set firmly, in a most powerful place where you absolutely understand and accept responsibility for your role in any relationship, for your role in the world, for your response to whatever it is you see, whatever it is in your surroundings.

You get to be who you want to be, no matter how other people are being. So, you can exercise your ability to respond, your response-ability, to things that have happened in the past, to things that happen outside of us, and thirdly, to your feelings.

I want you to think about yesterday. What was your most predominant feeling yesterday? What was the emotion you noticed the most, you know? I just want you to think about it for a second. Okay, got it? Okay, now if you've followed my work, you'll know that I teach that thoughts cause feelings. But at this point, it doesn't even matter because yesterday, when you were feeling whatever you were feeling, you had already created that reality with your thoughts.

You already had a thought that created a feeling, and there it was. So, maybe you felt sad. Maybe you felt lonely. Maybe you felt happy. Maybe you felt guilty. Maybe you felt relieved. Maybe you felt angry. It doesn't matter. But whatever it was, you also got to choose your response to it.

So, what was your response to it? Did you choose your response to that feeling, that emotion consciously? Did you choose it on purpose? Or did you default to something unconscious and pre-programmed that made you feel even worse?

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Did you judge yourself for having that emotion? Did you use it as evidence of how your life always goes this way? Did you make it mean that things are off track or that there's something wrong with you? Did you use that emotion as proof of how stuck you must be? Did you just believe the old story that showed up in your brain?

Now, if that's what's happened, you've done nothing wrong. Don't hear me say that you're doing anything wrong. You're not. You have a perfectly functioning human brain. And these knee-jerk responses that are unconscious, they're not right, they're not wrong, they're just well-established neural pathways in your brain.

But exercising our ability to consciously respond to our emotions means that when we notice an emotion and it's in our body, we're still the boss. We can intentionally exercise our ability to respond. We can choose to be our own champion. We can talk to ourselves in ways that enable us to create more of what we want instead of less.

So, you can create new patterns of behavior, new responses to the stimulus, the feeling, that create a different outcome. So, just because you notice anger, doesn't mean you have to act from anger. Just because you notice an urge, doesn't mean you have to eat the chocolate or drink the wine or spend the money. Just because you notice that you feel sad or lonely, doesn't mean you have to judge yourself as off-track.

I want you to consciously choose how you respond to your emotions. Yes, we create our emotions with our thought. This is true. It's a whole other teaching and there's lots of ways to apply that to life. But for this purpose, the emotion, if it's already there because we've already thought the thought, the feeling is now in our body, we still get to decide how we want to think about it.

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And so, many times I have so many clients who are suffering because of their judgment of their feelings. They're telling themselves their response to their feelings is that they're doing it wrong. Their response is that they shouldn't be feeling this way. Their response is that there's something wrong with them.

And, ladies, and gentlemen if you're out there, that is not true. And it's not useful. That's probably the bigger takeaway message here, that we can find the truth in anything, frankly, but it's just not useful. Because if you're feeling angry, and then you shame yourself for feeling angry, now you're just feeling worse instead of better. Now you've just created shame on top of anger. That's not helpful.

If you're feeling angry and you just say, "You know what, it's okay that I feel angry. All humans feel angry, especially grieving ones. And when I think this thought, it makes me feel angry. And that is okay. I can handle this anger. I can process this feeling. I don't have to act from this place. But there is nothing wrong with me as a human because I'm having an emotion."

And exercising that ability to respond, that response-ability, starts with knowing that no matter what we experience, we get to decide how we want to think about it, how we want to think about ourselves, how we want to think about our past, how we want to think about our future, our capability, our capacity, our feelings, things other people have done. Our ability to respond, even to how we feel, even to the things that other people say, is what determines the outcomes that we create next in life. And if we want to love life again, we must increase our ability to choose our response. It's a skill and a muscle that, with practice, we can develop.

Now, some of you might be thinking, "But, Krista, what about PTSD?" And I hear you. Even if you have PTSD and your brain's automatic response to a

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particular trigger is currently out of your conscious control, you still have the ability to think about your PTSD triggers in ways that serve you, or in ways that keep you stuck and make you a victim to them.

You can still decide that there's something that's forever going to be out of your control, that you're damaged goods, that you're beyond repair, that this is just a new normal that you have to resign yourself to, or you can decide that you've done nothing wrong because you've had past trauma. You can decide that your response is that there is nothing inherently wrong with you because your brain is still responding to a past threat as though it's a current threat.

You can decide to respond to an existing trauma pattern, that exists by no fault of your own, by getting help, by investing in your mental wellbeing, by finding a mental health professional who understands trauma who has tools to help you undo those patterns in your brain, right? Maybe the PTSD is the stimulus, but your response is still within your control.

So, please don't ever settle or think that you don't have the ability to choose to respond to anything. We just figure out, what is the stimulus and what do we want our response to be? And we exercise our ability to choose that response on purpose. And by doing so, we are always consciously creating the next outcome that we want.

And that's everything. If we don't have that skill, we're just running around repeating often very useless unhelpful patterns that don't take us where we want, that don't have us living life on purpose, that don't have us being able to love life again, even after loss. And that is what I want for you. That's what I want for you.

It's possible for you. I don't care what you've been through. Even if you're, "But, Krista, you don't know what I've been through," it doesn't matter. No

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one can take away your ability to choose. No one can take away your ability to respond. You can give it away. You can decide that you don't have it. But that's the only reason that it goes away, is because you don't exercise your ability to respond.

And I believe in you, alright. Okay, that's what I have for you this week. Hey, I also want to remind you, if you are not in my Facebook group, it is free. If you're just looking for a place where you can talk with other widowed moms who get you, and maybe you're not in a position right now to pay for coaching or pay for a program, I get it. I want to invite you to come on into that Facebook group.

It's called The Widowed Mom Podcast Community. You just have to go on Facebook, search it. It asks you a couple of questions. You have to agree to be a nice person and not sell anything. And then complete those quick couple of questions, we'll let you in, and you can introduce yourself and feel supported by women who are genuinely just loving, good humans who are doing the best that they can in their new normal too.

Alright, I hope that was useful to you. Remember, I love you, and you've got this, alright. I'll see you next week. Take care, everybody, bye-bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence. Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to coachingwithkrista.com and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.