

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

Krista: Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 68, *Alone but Not Lonely*.

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

Krista: Hey there, welcome to another episode of a podcast. How are you doing? I've been having some fun getting ready to do a retreat, a virtual retreat, unfortunately. I was hoping it could be in person, but it's going to be virtual because of COVID and it is for the members of my Mom Goes On Masters Program. Those are ladies who have completed my Mom Goes On Program, they have graduated from the six months that we spent together and they wanted to keep going and keep learning and keep creating that next chapter. So, I created a Masters Program for them.

So, we're doing a fun virtual retreat and I'm getting ready for that and I've got a few fun things up my sleeve. So, that's happening and then also I'm having a lot of fun with this September prize challenge that I'm doing. So, if you're listening to this podcast in September, which you are if you're listening when it comes out, and you are wanting to play along in the fun and potentially win this gorgeous Baroque pearl necklace, you can either get it in 14K gold or silver, but I love it. It's this beautiful little pearl necklace that is called Grit and it comes with a card which I read in the last episode.

But one of the things it says that, "To the woman who wears this necklace is unstoppable and she knows it's not what happens, but how she chooses to respond with perseverance in her mind and passion in her heart." I just love that so much, so if you want a chance to win that necklace then play along with us and all you have to do is just do a little screengrab on your phone as you're listening to the podcast and then post it on Instagram and

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

tag me @LifeCoachKrista and I will see it. Then, if we aren't friends we can become friends and get to know each other over Instagram and then my hope is that it's just another way to let widowed moms know about this podcast because there's 11 million widows just in the United States alone and most of them are not feeling supported as they want to and I want to get this podcast out to them.

So, play along, screengrab, every time you do it, I will enter you to win and one lucky listener will get this beautiful Grit necklace. Before we do today's podcast episode, *Alone but Not Lonely*, I'm going to read a quick little listener shoutout and I just realized I went to get a listener shoutout and as I was reading through it I realized I know this person. She didn't use her full name in the podcast review and when she wrote this review she wasn't someone I knew, but now I know her because she's in my Mom Goes On six-month group coaching program.

Let me read you her review. It means a lot more to me now that I'm actually working with her and I know her story and I'm already seeing her make such amazing progress, but I'm going to read it to you. So, the title of her review was, "The Very Best" and she wrote, "July of last year our beloved puppy of 12 years died. Two months later our mother-in-law who lived with us for 10 years died, and two months after that, the day before Thanksgiving, our 15th anniversary, my sweet, wonderful husband died. Grief-stricken is an understatement.

"We have six kids between us and 15 grandkids. Ken was this amazing 6'5" man with a heart as huge as he is. With the whole family grieving it's hard to know what to do and how to help. I've been lost and heartbroken in my grief. I have been seeing a therapist yet hasn't been helping as much as I'm needing. I found Krista and it's this amazing door opening. She's touched on topics that haven't been able to recognize or name which have been causing me challenges so I listen to them every day.

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

“It’s been so helpful and I feel the years I have left may still have some joy and happiness.”

I have to tell you guys reading this and knowing it was actually written before this woman, who I won’t name because she didn’t give me permission, but before she joined my program and watching how far she’s already come, you guys, it’s exactly why I do this work and it makes me so happy. So, so happy, so you know who you are and I am so proud of you and I just want you to keep showing up for yourself, keep doing the work. You’re doing it, right? And the changes that you’re experiencing aren’t because of me, they’re because you have invested in yourself and you are doing the work. So, take full credit, okay?

All right, let’s talk about loneliness. I used to keep a tally. Whenever anyone is applying to work with me I have them fill out a questionnaire and one of the questions I ask is, “What are the most common three emotions that you’re feeling?” I used to keep a tally on this just because I was curious to know what the trends were and are, and loneliness was always right there near the top.

So, I know this is an issue that a lot of us have dealt with or are dealing with. My approach to loneliness is maybe just a little bit different than most. I have a slightly unique perspective and it’s not because I don’t think that some of what other people share about loneliness is bad advice or that their strategies aren’t advisable and good to try because I do, but most of us have already heard that we should get a cat or a dog or get a plant or try new things or connect with new people and get off of social media and get out in public.

We’ve heard these things and they’re not bad pieces of advice, but I just want to go a little bit beyond that. I want to talk to you about three myths about loneliness. Three things that I think are just misunderstood about

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

loneliness and I think once you understand these three things you can change your experience of it.

So, I want to start by defining loneliness, what is it? There's two definitions I want to share with you. One of them, I think, contributes to the misunderstandings that I'm going to share with you. The second one I like much more.

The first one came from Merriam-Webster and I think this is part of the problem, not that it's Merriam-Webster's fault, but this is the popular way that we look at loneliness and it says, the definition of lonely, "1A) Being without company, lone, i.e. Too many lonely nights at home. Cut off from others, solitary, i.e. The train stopped frequently at lonely little stations. Not frequented by human beings, desolate, i.e. A lonely spot in the woods. And sad from being alone, lonesome, i.e. He was feeling lonely without his wife and children."

Do you notice that everything about that definition has to do with what's happening outside a person, right? Blames the emotion on the circumstance. Now, here's the definition that I think is more accurate, more useful for us and it comes from *Psychology Today*.

"Loneliness is the state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one's desires for social connection and the actual experiences of it. Even some people who are surrounded by others throughout the day or are in a long-lasting marriage still experience a deep and pervasive loneliness."

I'm going to read part of that again. "Loneliness is the state of distress or discomfort that results when one perceives a gap between one's desires for social connection and actual experiences of it." Okay, can you see the difference?

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

The Merriam-Webster definition tells us that the problem is that we're cut off from others, we don't have other people around us, we're not frequented by human beings. We are physically by ourselves.

The other definition that I like attributes loneliness to the perceived gap between our desire for connection and our actual experience of it. So, I want to dive into that more specifically. I read a *New York Times* article from earlier this spring and Julianne Holt-Lunstad, a professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young has studied loneliness extensively and she was quoted in this article and what she found that loneliness can lead to serious consequences.

In fact, one of her studies found that lacking any social connection may be comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes per day as a risk factor for mortality. Another study found that loneliness increases the risk of an earlier death by 26%, 26% earlier death. She also found that social isolation, loneliness and living alone exceed the risks of death associated with obesity, physical activity, and air pollution.

I say this not to worry you, I say this to say let's take loneliness seriously. Let's consider what we can actually do about it. What we can actually do about it might not be what you think. Also, according to a survey that was done by Stigma in January of 2020, so this was pre-COVID, survey of 10,000 Americans ages 18 and over, 61% of adults, so that's 3 in 5 reported that they're lonely. This is pre-COVID and these people are not necessarily even widows, nothing about that type of data was a part of the survey results.

So, 10,000 Americans surveyed, 61% of adults, 3 in 5, reported that they're lonely. So, this is something we want to pay attention to. It's not just us as widows, but it is something we want to pay attention to because clearly there are consequences not only to the way that we feel and our enjoyment of life, but to our physical well-being.

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

Okay, so, three myths of loneliness that I want to share with you, the first one is that you are a lonely person. We describe loneliness sometimes as though it's who we are. It's not who we are. You are not a lonely person. If you are defining yourself as a lonely person please listen to me. You are not a lonely person. Loneliness is a part of your human experience. It's an experience you're having. Let's not make it more than it is. Let's not define ourselves by any one emotion.

Overidentifying with loneliness and making it part of our identity makes it stronger, makes it more difficult to manage, makes it more difficult to change. So, I want to offer that describing yourself as a lonely person is inaccurate and it doesn't serve you. We're humans and loneliness can be a part of our human experience, but it doesn't need to define us and we aren't served by identifying as lonely people.

So, I want to offer that myth number one that there's no such thing as a lonely person. There are people experiencing loneliness. The second thing is that loneliness doesn't come from where we think it comes from because we think loneliness comes from our partner's death. We think loneliness comes from something outside of us. It's not true.

Loneliness just like happiness is an inside job. It comes from the way that we think and this is good news. It's not to say that you're doing anything wrong if you feel lonely. Don't hear me say that at all. Believe me, I have felt lonely many times, but what is causing the loneliness doesn't exist outside of you which means the solution is also not outside of you.

Where we get caught is that we think that loneliness is caused by our relationship status, by what's happened to us in life, by the death of our partner. We think it's caused by the lack of a relationship or by the amount of time we spend with people in relationships. If that's where we think loneliness comes from, somewhere outside of us, and the solution then also exists outside of us then often we end up trying to solve an unsolvable

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

problem. We ended up rebounding into relationships that we aren't really ready for, we end up chasing things outside of us which is so futile. We spin our wheels.

The truth is that the reason we feel lonely isn't because our partner died, it doesn't have anything to do with what's going on outside of us as adults, it's because of how we're thinking. Thoughts cause feelings. Again, not right/wrong, not good/bad just thoughts cause feelings. Once you know this then you can start to contemplate a future where you are alone, but not lonely. That's how I felt for the longest time when I figured this out. I wasn't dating anyone. It took me over, well almost four years before I started dating someone after Hugo died.

In the early days I was lonely. When I discovered this work and I realized what was going on in my brain I changed that for myself and I got to a place where I actually didn't feel lonely, I was quite content. I enjoyed my own company and that's such a powerful place to be if we do want another relationship because then once we've mastered that and we realize that we can create our own emotional state and we can meet our own emotional needs because we're not broken and there's no missing piece as the Shel Silverstein book touts, then we can enter into a new relationship because we're looking to give not because we're trying to fill a void.

So, it is possible that we can be alone but not lonely. Conversely, however, we can be with people and not lonely, right? We can be lonely but not alone. So, what's really happening there? Because you've been there, right? You've been around other people, maybe before you became a widow, but certainly since you became a widow, I guarantee it. You've been around people, they've been physically near you but yet you felt alone.

If loneliness were caused by our proximity to other people, why were you feeling alone? Because here's what's really happening. This is what I hear

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

all the time. This is what I used to experience myself. We're in a crowd of people or a group of people, maybe they're our old friends, maybe they're our co-workers, people are around us. But in our mind we're thinking about how he should be here and how we miss him so we're physically present, but mentally somewhere else and we're arguing with what happened and it wishing it were different.

Often we're thinking, "Nobody understands what it's like to be me. Nobody gets me." Does that sound familiar to you. These thoughts cause disconnection. They block us from the opposite of loneliness which I propose is connection. When we're feeling disconnected, when we're feeling lonely, when we're feeling misunderstood and isolated and cut-off, guess how we show up.

Humans who feel that way isolate, we disconnect, we disengage. We're physically there, but we're mentally somewhere else. We pull into ourselves and we shrink and maybe we go through the motions in a conversation, but we're not fully engaged. We're not fully present. We're not actually showing up as authentically who we are. We're trying to manage our image. We're holding our cards closer than we normally would.

We're not really showing people because we're feeling lonely or disconnected or isolated. We're not really showing people what's really going on for us which creates more disconnection, more isolation, more loneliness. Can you see how we do this? It makes sense, right, that we get caught in this trap because of how we're thinking about the people around us and we feel so isolated and then we further isolate and we create more isolation. We aren't feeling connected and so we don't show up the way a person who's feeling disconnected would and we don't create more connection.

Now, this could be even more complicated, historically speaking, based on how you grew up. Maybe you some insecure attachment as a child that

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

carried into adulthood meaning that you didn't get the love and connection that other children did. Maybe you expected abuse or neglect. Maybe you didn't have a safe base from which to explore the world. Sometimes when those issues don't get resolved we carry them into our adult relationships. We fear being abandoned and we struggle to let people get close. We don't show up authentically because we're afraid of getting rejected. So, because we don't show people the real us, we never really give them a chance to get to know who we are and to build authentic connections.

Maybe for you, maybe you got past that with your partner. Maybe you think that your partner was the only one who really got you, the only one you could really be authentic with, the only who was safe for you, and without that physical relationship in your life you pull back into your shell and you don't show up the way you showed up around your partner. Other people don't even get to see the real you.

So, it makes sense then, right? If we have a secure sense of attachment and a positive sense of self then being with ourselves doesn't feel lonely. We can actually enjoy solitude and when we're with other people and we have a secure sense of attachment and a positive sense of self because we show up authentically as who we are, we experience deeper connections with other people. But when the opposite is true and we have a negative sense of self or we have some insecure attachment we don't enjoy being with ourselves and we often don't enjoy being with other people.

Then it's made all the more complicated based on the beliefs that we had about our spouse and their significance in our life and their loss. But connection is something we can create with our thinking, so all is not lost here. I love giving this example from my own life because it was the first time where it really hit me and it hit me. Like, it smacked me over the head. You've probably heard me tell this story before, but it was just such a powerful moment for me.

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

So, I'm in my parents' cabin in Colorado which is a place that Hugo loved to go. He loved going there, he loved watching my dad build that cabin and following along with the progress and only a few weeks before he died we had hiked up a 14er, totally unprepared and had plans to go back the next summer and do another one.

So, I'm sitting in the main room in the cabin which has just all of these beautiful windows looking at the mountains kind of cabins in the valley, looking up at the mountains and I'm with my daughter and I said something about I just wish Hugo were here. In that moment I was really feeling disconnected from him. I was feeling that kind of longing. Just longing for him to be there and to be sharing that view with us because I knew how much he loved it.

And my daughter looked at me almost in disbelief. I swear sometimes she is such an old soul, but she looked at me and she said, "Momma, he is here." Like, how can you not think that he's here? And it just hit me, I'm here experiencing a disconnection. I am here experiencing a longing, she is right next to me and she's feeling connected. The only thing that's different is what's happening in our mind.

She has given herself permission to believe that he's with us, he's here. I haven't. In that moment I realized connection has nothing to do with whether is physically in the room with us and everything to do with how we choose to think of them. It just hit me like a ton of bricks. I'll never forget it.

So, that's what I want you to be thinking about. Loneliness, it is a part of our human experience. It's not something you've done bad, right? It's not something you need to get away from, but you want to understand where it came from. You want to know that it come, it isn't currently coming from anything outside of you. It's coming from the way that you are thinking about what's happened in your life, the way that you are thinking about

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

what's going on around you. When you understand that, if you want, you can change it.

So, recapping so far, you are not a lonely person. We are not lonely humans, we are humans experiencing loneliness, and your partner's death or something outside of you didn't cause your loneliness. Loneliness, just like happiness, is something that comes from the inside. All emotions do and that's amazing news, okay?

The third myth is that loneliness can only be viewed as a problem, but what if that's not true? Now, if we don't deal with loneliness clearly as I explained, some of the impacts of loneliness, it can be experienced as a problem, but that doesn't mean that it's the only way that we can look at it; that loneliness is a problem.

I want to offer to you that you consider that loneliness could be an opportunity, and before you shut off the podcast or want to pull out your earbuds or punch me through your device, I hear you, this is not a platitude. This is not me trying to put lipstick on a pig or find the silver lining, this is me sincerely telling you that if you aren't content being by yourself, there's something you're missing about yourself because you're wonderful. You're amazing. There is nothing about you in my highly biased opinion that isn't enjoyable.

So, if you see loneliness as an opportunity to get to know yourself, so powerful. I don't feel lonely because I've done a lot of work to understand who I am and I have a good relationship with myself. I have nurtured and chosen to think loving and compassionate thoughts about myself. Therefore, I'm okay with who I am including, especially, my human flaws.

This doesn't mean that I have changed myself so that I can love myself and be okay with myself. It means I have changed the lens through which I view myself and it is now one of compassion and love which allows me to love

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

myself as who I am for who I am, the imperfect human that I am. Again, I'm not saying loneliness is right or wrong or that someone I'm better than you. What I'm saying is that spending the time to get to know yourself, to investigate yourself in a way that helps you learn about who you are and accept yourself for who you are without changing is what gets you to the point where you enjoy your relationship with yourself and you can be alone but not lonely.

Loneliness can be the opportunity to go back and do the work that increases our sense of self-acceptance, and self-love, and self-compassion and what a beautiful thing to do. Because think about how much healthier, if you want a relationship in the future, could that next relationship be because you've done that work. How much more enjoyable is it to be a human on the planet when you can love yourself even with all of your imperfections and flaws.

So, what I want you to consider is are you accepting yourself just as you are? As a whole person who is both good and bad, both beautiful and ugly? Are you opening into yourself? Are you comfortable being with yourself? Are you connecting to yourself? If not, could loneliness be the sign that says, "Let's do this"? There's someone in here and she deserves to be loved and heard and known by you. Loneliness isn't just a problem. If we don't deal with it it's going to be, but it's also an opportunity for us to get to know ourselves and that's what I want for you. I want you to be in that place where you know yourself, you love yourself, you're comfortable with yourself, you feel good in your own skin.

That doesn't mean change anything to get there, that means change the way you think about yourself to get there, and then from that place whether you're by yourself or with others. If you're by yourself you're enjoying solitude and you're feeling connected to yourself. Maybe you're feeling connected to nature. You're feeling connected to people who aren't physically present with you and you're in love with life and with being on the

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

planet. When you are with people your relationships aren't superficial and you're not people pleasing because you're comfortable with yourself, and you know that other people's opinions are theirs. You don't hold back, you show up authentically as you. So, you're winning when you're alone and you're winning when you're with people. That's what's available to you and starting to change how you think about loneliness is the first step.

So, let's review. You're not a lonely person. You're having the experience of loneliness. Loneliness is not good/bad, right/wrong, it is also not caused by anything outside of us. And loneliness isn't something we have to just define as a problem. It can be an opportunity, an invitation, a window, a door to get to know who really are and love her. It can be an opportunity to have a richer, more satisfying relationship with yourself which will set you up for a more authentic, more satisfying, deeper, more meaningful relationship with those around you. Okay?

That's what I want you to know about loneliness. Now, again, if you don't have a dog or a cat and you would benefit from a plant, I'm not saying don't go do those traditional things that people tell us to do to help with loneliness. If you can get out and be around people, great. But listen, those things, in and of themselves will not change your feeling of loneliness.

You can still think in ways that create loneliness even in the presence of other people, of a lovely dog. Right? You still have to consider the way you think about those things if you want to experience connection because connection and loneliness come from our mind and they are opportunities to get to know ourselves better.

All right, I hope you have a beautiful week and I hope you remember that no matter how you feel, I love you. And in all seriousness, you've got this. All right, take care. Have a beautiful week. I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

Ep #68: Alone but Not Lonely

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.