

Ep #69: Put Down Your Manuals



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 69, Put Down Your Manuals. Pain is a natural part of life, right? But suffering doesn't have to be. And one of the ways we create suffering is by carrying around manuals. And in this episode, I'm going to teach you all about it, so you can recognize when you're carrying a manual, and if you choose to, you can set it down.

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, everybody. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. Fall is in full effect over here. If you've listened to the podcast before, you know, I'm kind of a fall nut and my daughter and I always joke about it because all the memes that you see and anyone who loves fall appears to be considered basic. Not a term I use. But apparently, it's a popular term amongst the young people. But I guess I'm basic because I still like fall. I still love decorating.

So, that's what I've been doing around here is just embracing the season, even though it's COVID and it's a little bit weird. I'm enjoying what I can of fall. So, fall, we are fully decorated. Have been, frankly in my house, since late August. But this weekend, the boyfriend and I went and got fall decorations for his house. His idea actually, not even mine. But he didn't really have anything fall-ish and I think he appreciated my enthusiasm for fall. So, we went and got all things fall for his house. Just a few things. But now it feels kind of cuddly and cozy in there. So, that was kind of fun.

And we're considering – haven't yet planned, but considering a trip to Arkansas in either late October, maybe early November. Because apparently – he knew this, I didn't. But apparently, Arkansas is rated

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among the top five in the country for places to watch the leaves turn. And that sounds like something we can do safely with COVID. So, I live in Kansas. He's actually from Arkansas, so looking at doing that too. So, it should be interesting.

If you're listening when the podcast comes out, or at least early October, just a reminder that we're doing a little fun giveaway. I'm giving away a Baroque pearl necklace from a company that I recently discovered and kind of fallen in love with their jewelry. Not even so much – I like the jewelry, but what I really like is the philosophy behind each piece and the motivating cards that come with each piece.

So, this necklace that I'm giving away, which you can enter to win, is called Grit. And it tells a story about a strong woman who's been through adversity. Hello, listeners, strong women who have been through adversity. That's us.

So, I'm going to give one of those away. If you want to register to win, you can have fun with me. Just screengrab yourself listening to the podcast. Just capture what's on your phone, whether it's from Apple Podcasts or Spotify or Stitcher or straight off of my website. Just screengrab it and share it on Instagram, and tag me @lifecoachkrista. And I will see it and other people will hopefully see it too. It will help promote the podcast. And then every time you do that, I will enter your name to potentially win this beautiful Grit necklace. And you can choose whether you would like that in gold or silver.

Okay, let's talk about manuals. This is something I learned from my coach, my teacher Brooke Castillo several years ago, a long time ago actually. And it's been really, really helpful to me. So, I wanted to teach you this concept too. We suffer so much unnecessarily in life. And yes, pain is definitely a part of the human experience. So, I'm not trying to suggest that

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we aren't supposed to experience pain as humans, because I do think that we are.

But we also create a lot of unnecessary suffering for ourselves. I know I have done this. And so, in this episode, I'm going to share with you this concept of manuals, what it means to have a manual, how to recognize when you have a manual, so that you can see the benefit of putting it down, if you'd like.

So, a manual is essentially a metaphor for an unwritten instruction book. So, think about any time you buy some sort of a device from the store. Usually, it comes with an instruction book. It tells you how to use the device. And a lot of us have these unwritten instruction books about other people.

We have these manuals about how people are supposed to behave, what they are supposed to do, what they're not supposed to do, what it means to be a good mother, brother sister, father, coworker, boss, what it means to be a good daughter, a good son.

We have these manuals for other people and we think that if people don't follow our manuals, that we have to feel frustrated, we have to feel annoyed, we have to feel upset, we have to get angry. We think that we can't be happy unless other people would just follow our manuals. And if they would just follow our manuals, we could be happy. We could have the kind of life that we want to have. We could have the kind of relationship that we want to have.

So, we have manuals for other people. We also have manuals for ourselves, ways that we're supposed to behave, standards that we're supposed to live up to. And we have manuals for our lives. We have ways that we think our lives are supposed to go. And if they don't go that way,

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then we feel emotionally captive. We feel like we can't have the life we want unless it turns out the way the manual says it was supposed to.

So, I want to give you permission, once you understand this concept, to kind of consider, what are the manuals that you have in your life? We all have them. It's not a matter of if we have them. We have them. It's a matter of, do we recognize when we're not allowing ourselves to enjoy life because part of life isn't going according to our manual.

And that's when it's to our advantage to consider putting the manual down, to consider, do I want to expect this person to behave in this way and hold myself hostage, such that I can't be happy unless they do?

So, let me give you some examples. So, here are some manuals I've had. I have had some manuals for my children, each of my children. My children, according to my manual, are supposed to be respectful and do what I say. They're not supposed to fight in the back seat of the car while I am driving. They are not supposed to roll their eyes. They are supposed to clean their rooms. They are supposed to put their devices away without complaint before we sit down to eat dinner. They are supposed to, without me asking, take their plates, rinse them off, and put them in the dishwasher.

My children are supposed to do all of these things. And in the past, there have been times where I have gotten myself very upset when my children did not follow my manual. Specifically, I remember my now 16-year-old daughter, when she was around four, having all sorts of drama around bedtime and around what she was going to wear. She had some very independent thoughts about what things went together that did not line up with what I thought went together.

And so, in effort to get her to follow my manual, I turned into a bit of a control freak. I was defining my success as a parent based on how my child

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behaved. And I wasn't allowing myself to feel the way I wanted to feel, calm and confident and in control, until I made this little being, separate from me, follow my manual.

And if you're listening to this podcast, you're probably a widowed mom and you probably have kids and you probably know that this is a recipe for disaster. We can't control our children.

Now, I am not saying that we can't have rules, that we can't have expectations, that we can't and shouldn't have consequences. But what I am saying is that if we believe our emotional wellbeing is determined by the behavior of the little people in our lives, or our in-laws, or our mothers, or anyone else for that matter, our bosses, our neighbors, our sisters. If we believe that until they follow our manual, we can't be happy, guess what we're spending most of our energy trying to do?

We spend most of our energy trying to change them, to manipulate them, to control them. And it comes from a very well-meaning place, right? We're not trying to hurt anybody when we're in this space. We just don't understand that our happiness isn't dependent upon whether they follow our manual. We don't even know we have one most of the time. We just think that this is how good children behave, that good parents get their kids to behave in this way, that this is how good sisters treat people.

So, all of us have these manuals, but most of us just haven't given it much thought. So, I want you to do that now. What are the things you expect of the people in your life, that if they don't comply with, you get unhappy? What are all those things you wish people would do differently?

If only they would call me more? Or call me less? If only they would ask me to go out with them more and include me in events, or if they would just stop expecting me to go to events, because I'm not in the mood. If they

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would just vote in a particular way. If they could see our current political climate my way. If they would just talk about my husband and ask me how I'm doing. Or if they would just stop talking about my husband and asking me how I'm doing. Do you see where I'm headed?

It's all very individual. We all have these expectations of other people. And we think that when they don't follow our expectations, that that is the reason that we are unhappy. So, of course, we will try to change them and get them to comply with our expectations. And, of course, that has us promptly delegating our emotional wellbeing to things we cannot control.

So, when we notice a manual and when we notice how so much of our emotional state is dependent upon the behavior of someone outside of us that we can't control, then we can start to make some decisions about whether or not we want to keep that manual. Because what are the odds that all the people around us are going to change and behave exactly the way we want? Probably not great, right? At least not in my world.

Not only can we have manuals for other people. We can also kind of have manuals for the universe. I definitely did. I had manuals for how my life was supposed to unfold, how things were supposed to go down. My manual said my husband was not supposed to die. My manual said we were going to work together and travel together and retire together and grow old and be happy together.

And my manual said that, certainly even after he died, people who drive drunk and have meth in their systems and are convicted of involuntary manslaughter, my manual said those people should get more than four years behind bars. My manual says it's not supposed to take a full year for the court proceedings to happen, for those decisions to be made. I have lots of ideas in my manual about how things in the world are supposed to happen. And many times, the world doesn't follow my manual.

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We also have manuals about ourselves, about how we're supposed to be. I used to think, you know, if I don't have it all together, if I'm not on top of all the things, all the kids' activities and all the work things, that I can't feel good. If I don't have a company-ready house all the time, I used to think that was a reflection on me.

For a long time, I believed that if I was above a certain clothing size, that I couldn't feel sexy, that I couldn't feel proud of how I was parenting unless my kids had less than a certain amount of time in front of screens. That I always had to stay calm and look good and everything needed to look like Pinterest and Instagram in order for me to feel good about myself.

Can you see how manuals create suffering? Are you starting to see where your manuals might be? And we have to be careful because people will agree with us about our manuals. Our manuals will seem noble, appropriate even.

Lots of people would say, "Well yes, that is the way people should behave." But yet, they don't. Yes, that is the way life is supposed to go. But it doesn't. And our insistence on holding onto those manuals, knowing that people won't behave according to our manual and that the universe won't unfold according to plan just creates suffering on our part.

Now, please don't hear me say that you can't have expectations. Please don't worry that laying down a manual will turn you into a doormat. It won't. Putting down your manual doesn't mean you no longer have preferences. It doesn't mean you no longer have boundaries. It doesn't mean you no longer have consequences in your household. It doesn't mean you're no longer raising children according to your values. It doesn't mean that you just roll over and whatever happens happens and you love all of it.

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What it means is that you stop letting things outside of you control your emotional state. It means that you stop being victim to the things you can't predict, to the ways that other people choose to show up in life, and to the things that you just genuinely can't control, because they don't have anything to do with your thoughts, your feelings, your actions.

Putting down a manual means you are accepting what it is you can control and what it is you can't control. And you're choosing to create your emotional state regardless. Putting down your manual means you're taking back your power and you're laying down your urge to control the entire world because you recognize that how the world goes has very little to do with how you choose to see the world and experience it.

And so, when I'm coaching in my Mom Goes On program, we do this. We go very specifically through our manuals and we identify them. And I encourage you to do this as well. What are the manuals you have for other people, for yourself, for your life? What are those things that you think just should be? Which ones are serving you? Which ones aren't?

And can we just put down the ones that aren't serving us? Can we just put down our manuals and stay in the present moment and decide to love people for who they choose to be, instead of who we think they're supposed to be? Can we put down our manuals for ourselves and choose to love ourselves just as we are, without conditions, without hustling for our worth, without saying, "Well I'll love myself when I lose weight or make more money or find another relationship," or whatever conditions you might have put on your own self-love?

Can we put down our manuals for our lives and for how it's all supposed to be, and just enjoy life the best we can as it is? This is what I want for you. This doesn't take away our pain. This doesn't mean that we'll never feel a negative emotion again. But this does lessen our suffering.

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So, in summary, we all have manuals. We have them for relationships in our lives. We have them for how our lives are supposed to go. We have manuals for ourselves. And when we live by those manuals and insist that those manuals are followed, we turn into control freaks. And I'm preaching to the choir. Just ask my kids, right?

The more we can lay these manuals down, the more peace, the more freedom, the more enjoyment and the less suffering we can experience. And that doesn't turn us into doormats. That actually puts us back in a place of power. That puts us back in a place that lets us roll with the punches instead of having us resist them at every turn.

And life is just more enjoyable when we aren't fighting it so darn much and people are so much more enjoyable when we're loving the, for who they are. And we are so much more enjoyable when we accept ourselves as we are, without putting conditions on it.

Alright, that is the manual. Go forth. Identify your manuals. And if you so choose, put those suckers down because offer that life is way better without them. Alright, I love you. You've got this Have a beautiful week. Take care. 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.

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