

## Ep #72: Less Drama More Mama: An Interview with Pam Howard



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Krista St-Germain**

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

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Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 72, Less Drama, More Mama, an Interview with Pam Howard.

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. I've got something fun for you, a little treat I convinced my friend Pam Howard, who is also a licensed clinical social worker and a school counselor and a life coach. And host of what I think is probably my favorite-named podcast of all times, Less Drama More Mama.

I convinced Pam to come and talk with us a little bit about some of the struggles of solo parenting. And Pam is not a widow, but she has been a solo parent and she does relate to the struggle on not only a personal level, but also for certain a professional one.

Some of the things I think you're going to get out of this episode, Pam and I talked about the ridiculous things that we're told about self-care and what her take is on what real self-care looks like for solo parenting. She also teaches us about the three core emotional needs that each child has and our role as parents in that. We discussed how to keep our authority as moms by staying calm and just generally how to be less reactive as parents.

So, I hope this conversation is very valuable to you. I'm so grateful that Pam would take time out of her schedule to come and be with us. And with that, we'll jump in.

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Krista: Welcome, Pam. I'm so excited to have you on my podcast.

Pam: I'm so excited too. Thank you so much for having me.

Krista: Yeah, I really think that my listeners need your expertise. So, as you know, I've got a wide range of widowed moms that listen to the podcast. Some have little kids. Some have older kids. But I kind of see you, as your podcast, which is called Less Drama More Mama, you're like the smartest person I know when it comes to how to parent calmly, how to create connection with your kids, and how to get yourself out of drama as a parent.

And I don't think drama as a parent is unique to the widowed mom experience, but I think it's definitely heightened. So, you want to tell people a little bit, before we get started, how you got into this work, your background, things like that?

Pam: Sure, so growing up, I was always very attuned to my own feelings and to the feelings of other people. My dad was very reactive. He was a yeller and he had a temper. And my mom was the opposite. She was always happy and did not like negative feelings. So, any time I had a negative emotion, she was always trying to fix it and make it better. And I remember feeling like, "Just let me have this feeling." I just wanted to be upset when I was upset or, you know.

So, I just was always very attuned to that and always interested in relationships. So, I ended up at graduate school for social work and I

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signed up for the family and couples therapy track, or certification. And I knew at that point that I wanted to help families and moms.

And my first job out of grad school was working at an adolescent day treatment program, so working with teens and families between the ages of 12 and 18 who had all kinds of different issues and mental health diagnoses and things like that. And I was really young at the time, but I felt like I was really good at it. And I was able to, because I was so young, able to really identify with the feelings of the kids and help the parents see their perspective on things.

And so, I had always wanted to be a mom, so I thought, “I am just so ready to be a mom. I’m so excited. I’m going to be amazing at it. And I’m not going to make the same mistakes that my parents made and I’m...”

Krista: I might know what’s coming...

Pam: Right? So, of course, then I had kids and I often say – and I’m sure other people have said this too – I was the best mom before I had kids. So, I had my first daughter and when she was old enough to talk, she was old enough to talk back. And so, I was like, “What is going on here? This isn’t the way it’s supposed to be. This is not supposed to happen to me.”

And I became very reactive myself and noticed, I was acting like my dad had, yelling and taking things personally and feeling really powerless and out of control. And I was like, this is not the mom I want to be. This is not what she deserves. So, I got into therapy and I started reading all the parenting books that were out and, you know, really realized that I had been focusing on all the wrong things. I was focused on getting her to

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behave in a certain way so that I could feel better rather than being focused on myself and what I was in control of.

So, that completely changed my life and my mindset and I was like, “Okay, I’ve got to teach this to other people.” And so, I was a stay at home mom when my kids were young and I just decided, “I’m going to call myself a life coach and I’m going to help moms with this.” AT that point, I hadn’t had any certification in life coaching, but I was a social worker, a licensed clinical social worker. And so, I started some classes in my area and started helping people. And then eventually became certified through the Life Coach School and the rest is history.

Krista: So fun. Which is where we met, in life coach training. And then, we went through master coach training together at the same time. Amazing. So, okay, let me tell you kind of where I see my moms struggling, and then I have just so many questions so that we can benefit from your knowledge.

So, of course, all ages of parenting, but especially my moms with younger kids at home. A lot of them worry that we’re going to mess our kids up. We are kind of thrust into this grief experience that we didn’t necessarily see coming. You know, some saw it coming longer than others. But certainly, it’s not anything we asked for and not anything that we’ve ever really dealt with on this level.

So, a lot of my clients are trying to figure out – and it seems like an unmanageable task – how do they deal with not only their grief, but then how to they deal with their children’s grief at the same time? So, they feel very overwhelmed in that sense. They often feel the burden of the entire to-do list, all the things falling on them. There’s all kinds of things. It’s also very isolating too in that they don’t often have other women, other mom friends that can relate to this feeling.

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And sometimes, they want to appear stronger than they are, so we aren't very honest with what's really going on. But I kind of want your perspective on some of these things. So, talk to me a little bit first about just the whole reactivity bit that you talked about. Because maybe it wasn't something that they necessarily struggled with before their husband died. But now, they find anger can be a surprise part of grief. Maybe they're more angry than they used to be. But in general, they notice they are more reactive than they want to be. They don't like that aspect of how they're showing up as parents. What do they do?

Pam: Right, so first of all, I want to say that the thought that we're messing up our kids is not unique to widowed moms. I think we all have that thought at some point. I also want to mention, because I didn't say this in the beginning, that I'm divorced and I don't want to compare my experience at all to the experience of a widowed mom, but I didn't ask for my situation either.

So, I feel also like I was thrust into a situation where there was a lot of grief. A different kind of grief, but I was dealing with that. My kids were dealing with that too. So, I do have some sense of what it's like to all of a sudden be on your own and have to grieve the loss of the relationship, the loss of this future that I thought it was going to be. So, I just want to mention that because I can relate to a lot of the same thoughts, I think, that widowed moms may have.

And the reactivity comes from our thoughts and our anxiety about doing it right and all of the thoughts about, "I can't do it all. I didn't sign up for this." And when you're reactive, you end up bringing about the very thing that you're anxious about, the very situation that you're hoping to avoid.

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And so, the first thing that we have to do is to pause and understand that our thoughts are causing us to feel a certain way that is creating this reactivity. And I know, obviously you teach the same thing. But it's just really slowing it down.

And in the beginning, when I help moms do this, it's always looking back at a situation that happened at the beginning to say, "Okay, this happened, I became reactive, what could I have done differently?" And breaking it down, breaking it apart to see what could have gone a different way, how could I have thought about it in a different way?

And then, you get to the point where you are in the situation and you recognize that you're becoming reactive and you change it in the moment, in the situation to then eventually being much more calm and deliberately choosing thoughts that create that feeling of calm and being able to pause before you react.

So, it's definitely a process. It's not something that happens overnight. But it's totally normal. And especially like you said, anger is part of the grief process. And you all of a sudden are thrust into a new life and having to deal with things that maybe you hadn't dealt with before. And so, it's normal and natural. And I think being able to have compassion with yourself that you are human, this is part of the human experience.

Krista: Yeah, I do find a lot of my clients are beating the snot out of themselves for things that they have done, parenting or otherwise, but especially parenting. And they put so much pressure on themselves. Which I think only adds fuel to the fire of being reactive.

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This is what I wonder too. How much of it do you think – let me back up for a second. I think, if we don't stop judging ourselves and really, when we don't extend compassion to ourselves, we're never going to be able to change any pattern ever. We're just destined to keep repeating it if we don't love ourselves, even when we don't like the way we showed up as moms.

And then also, it seems like so much of it almost feels like a buildup, where you wake up in the morning and you think, "Okay, today, today is the day that I'm not going to yell, I'm going to stay calm, I'm going to parent like I want to parent." And then, without the skill of knowing how to allow feelings all day long, it's like the straws keep piling up on the camel's back and we just keep using resistance and willpower to try to grit our way through whatever it is that's going on.

And then, a lot of times, we reach that point where there's too many straws and it's the one that breaks us. Where, if we could learn in advance, how can I just love myself and let my feelings of frustration or anger or whatever it is flow through me all day long so that we don't have the buildup?

And I was just talking to one of my clients about this. So, a lot of moms, they think that if they're just calm long enough then their kids will change their behavior and they will calm down or they will do something different. And so, when you're saying they have willpower or resistance, it's like they're acting in a calm way, but inside, they're still feeling that tension or that like, "Okay, I just need to do this long enough, and then my child will change." As opposed to genuinely feeling calm and letting go of trying to control them so that you can feel better.

It's a very different experience because I think letting your kids also experience their emotions is letting go of always trying to make them happy

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or well-behaved or something like that and just focusing on what you can control, which is your own thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Krista: I'm so glad you said that because that also is, it's like layers of this. So, there are just, you know, our kids having feelings over everyday kinds of things that happen and then wanting them to feel differently so we can feel better. Then also, there's these added grief-related feelings. And every child seems to have a different experience. And so, then we're second guessing what's going on with each child and trying to make each child feel better.

And what I think you're saying is we need to just get comfortable with our children having feelings and know that feelings aren't a problem, they aren't broken because they're having different feelings. There's nothing we can do to change them. It's okay.

Pam: This is probably one of the biggest issues that I see with moms is they have such a hard time tolerating their kids' negative emotions. And I don't seem to have that problem. It's not that I don't care about my kids' feelings. But I just know that it's not a problem to be fixed and it's okay and, you know, I can validate their experience. And I know that it's coming from their thoughts. And that's just okay.

And yes, right now, you're feeling disappointed or you're feeling angry and I let them have those emotions. And then, at a calmer time, I might talk with them about it and process with them. But it just doesn't feel like it's ever a problem that they're having a feeling. And they can be feeling upset about something and I don't have to.

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And sometimes, I choose to feel upset when they're upset. But that's my choice. I don't have to always mirror their emotions. And I think also that sends them a good message that when I'm falling apart and I can't control myself or my emotions, I can look to mom and she's the one who's, you know, put together and she's the one that I look to help me. Because if I'm a mess and they're a mess, then, like, who are they going to turn to?

And it doesn't mean that you always have to be that way. I'm not saying that you always have to be put together. But what I'm saying is that just because your child is upset and having a negative emotion, doesn't mean you also do. Does that make sense?

Krista: Yeah, we can let them feel how they feel, and at the same time role model what it's like to be an emotional adult while others around us are having a different, maybe more reactive experience. We can be the calm in the storm.

So, another thing you said earlier was we need to pause. And so, I think what I was hearing you saying is the awareness comes after the fact first. So, we go back and we process, "Okay, this is why I yelled. I was feeling angry, frustrated, overwhelmed, resentful, whatever." And then we own that, of, "Okay, what was I thinking to make me feel that way? So, then we can see that pattern. But we can't change the pattern until after the fact. So, we have to be interested enough and compassionate enough so that after it's over we can go and see the pattern and look at it.

And then, our awareness and our ability to change kind of start to move to the left on the timeline. So, is that kind of how you teach it? What are some of your ways of helping people, once they understand the pattern, once they acknowledge that yes, my child's emotions aren't innately problems for me, you know. The way I feel is caused by the way I think and the way I

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behave is caused by the way I feel. So, I see that. Now, how do I start moving myself towards behaviors that are more aligned with what I want to take? How do I actually do that?

I think it starts with that awareness of the thoughts because once you learn that information, it's like you can't unlearn it. Now you understand where your feelings are coming from and you start to pay attention to the thoughts that you're having, you just – for me and my clients, they just naturally start to pay attention to that and think, "Oh, this is what I'm thinking." But that's just one option. I could choose to think so many other things and I could be thinking this... Oh, okay, that's interesting because when I think this, I feel better.

And so, it's just a natural progression of learning this work, I think. And then they'll come to me and they'll say, "Oh my gosh, you'll be so proud of me. I was so proud of me. I was in this situation and instead of thinking this, I thought, of course my kid is behaving this way. This is how they've always behaved in the past. I don't have to be surprised or think that they shouldn't be doing it because this is what's happening. So, I'm just going to be accepting of it in this moment. or I'm going to choose to be curious and ask some questions to find out more about what they're going through." And they just start practicing what we're talking about in our sessions and it becomes a way of life, a new way of life.

Krista: As you're saying that, I'm kind of imagining what might be going through some of my clients' minds, which could be something like, "Yeah, but, what if I decide that my child's emotions aren't problems and I stay calm all the time, won't I just be perpetuating bad behavior? Won't I just become a doormat? Won't they not respect me anymore?"

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Pam: Yeah, so I've gotten that question too. Now, this is the example that I like to give. So, when we are calm, we create authority. So, I want you to imagine you are working at a company and the CEO comes into the staff meeting and is very flustered and angry because the financial statements came in and numbers are really bad. The company is in the red, is it in the black, what is it?

Krista: Red. Yes...

Pam: In the red. So, the CEO is screaming and yelling and blaming people and very upset. And then the CFO comes into the room and sits down at the table and says, "Okay, you guys, listen, these numbers are really bad. But here's what we're going to do." And she lays out a plan for the next six weeks to get things moving. Who in that room has the authority? Who is the leader in that room, the person that people are going to look to and respect?

It's not the crazy CEO. It's the calm, confident CFO and it's not like we're going to walk all over her. We have respect. We want to listen to her because she's calm and she knows what she's talking about. And so, I think you can let your kid have their emotions. It doesn't mean that you're not going to set limits. It doesn't mean there's not going to be consequences for their behavior. It just means that you don't have to get upset when they do what they do.

Krista: Yeah, it seems like it makes us more powerful when we stay calm and better able to decide how we want to handle it and actually less or more likely to, not that we can change our kids, but more likely to elicit the kind of change that we're hoping will happen. At least we have a shot at it if we're calm.

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Pam: Because who wants to listen to a screaming CEO? And you're the CEO of your family. And then what happens, when you're reactive and screaming and yelling and everything is that they're less likely to listen to you because then it becomes like, well you're responsible. You're the mean mom and they start blaming you instead of taking responsibility for their own behavior and feelings. It becomes all about you instead of them.

Krista: Yeah, which is not useful at all either. So, where do you find moms struggle the most? Is it something different than what we've articulated? Is it feelings? Is it reactivity? What do you find to be the most common struggles? Especially when it comes to solo parenting?

Pam: I think most of the moms feel unsupported, unappreciated. Most of them come to me because they want to stop yelling at their kids and they want to learn how to be more calm. But I think some feel very alone. They feel, like you said before, nobody understands what they're going through and they don't feel supported.

Krista: Yeah, I also think we're just kind of brought up in this culture that says we are supposed to be the fixers. And we're supposed to be the ones that, you know, my family is saying the hostess with the mostest... That we're supposed to be the ones that make everybody happy and keep the peace and keep it all going smoothly. And because we're socialized to believe that number one that's even possible, which it isn't, and number two that it's our job, then it makes it very difficult to have realistic measure of what it means to be a successful parent. Because we start measuring our success in areas that we have no ability to control how our children behave, how happy they are.

Pam: Exactly.

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Krista: And that also presumes that happiness is the goal. Which I know you and I are aligned with that that's not what we believe. All the emotions are valuable and the human experience is not just about happiness. It's about richness and depth.

So, let's talk about the pandemic too because I think that's added some interesting complications. You know, we're recording this at a time where some people are now back in school and some people are still schooling from home. What do you think has changed with regards to the complications of parenting and what kind of wisdom do you have to help moms get through this weirdness?

Pam: I think everything and nothing, I suppose. Because really, everything in the external world has changed. But when it comes to parenting, it's still the same things that apply that we can't control all the external stuff. We can only control ourselves.

So, I myself have gone through a lot of ups and downs during this pandemic. And I have to keep reminding myself that this is all part of the human experience. And even though the pandemic has its challenges, there's nothing that I can't handle. I'm trying to take everything one day at a time. I'm trying to focus on the decisions that I need to make and making those decisions and then deciding that that's the right decision for me, with regard to my kids going back to school or staying at home and things like that. So, yeah, like I said, I think everything has changed and yet nothing has changed in terms of how we handle those challenges.

Krista: Yeah, it's kind of – I remember when the pandemic started. And you and I both use the self-coaching model and I recently did a podcast episode on that. So, my listeners are kind of starting to learn a little bit more about it as we go. But that's the major tool that I teach, and that you teach

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as well. And I remember when the pandemic started thinking, “Wow, this is the ultimate in being able to separate what we call the C-line from the T-line”

This is the ultimate in our ability to separate what we can't control and what we can. And it's like everything's different because there's so many different things we can't control right now. The pandemic and for some people it's hurricanes and it's the election and all of these other circumstances that seem to be so unique to 2020. But really, the same skillset applies in that when we can still figure out what we can and can't control – we can't control our kids. We can't control the pandemic. Can't control whether the school district says we have to keep our kids at home or not. But yet we can always control our response to those things.

Pam: Yeah, and I think looking for – I don't know that I love this term – the silver lining, but what we focus on is going to determine our experience. So, we could focus on all of the terrible things about this pandemic and, “Oh my gosh, I'm with my kids all the time, I have to wear this mask all the time,” or whatever it is. Or we can focus on, “Okay, I'm with my kids all the time. How can I make this the best experience possible?” And asking ourselves these kinds of questions of how can I make the most of this situation? What can I be learning from this? Where am I seeing that maybe I wasn't living my life in the way that I wanted to before and how can I make time for things now? I mean, just taking this situation and focusing on how to make it the best situation that we can.

Krista: Which is really always the goal. But also, I think what's important is that we don't – because sometimes, people think coaching is about positive thinking or happy, happy all the time and just fake it until you make it. And that's not at all what I ever want people to hear. There will always be the ups and downs. And that's a valuable part of the human experience.

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So, right now, I think we just have different downs and different ups. But we can still have the ups. Just because the downs have changed, maybe the ups are different than they used to be too. I don't know, I think I'm kind of lucky. My children are very self-sufficient and I love having them home from school, or schooling at home. I know that's not the experience other people are having, and I'm really fortunate that I don't have to teach them math because that would be a disaster.

So, there are some upsides. There are also some downsides in that there are things that they want to do that they don't get to do now. But anyway, it is what it is. I want to know too, let's talk a little bit about self-care. Because I know, when you don't really feel like you have much time anyway or you never feel like you have time to yourself, and sometimes for my clients, it feels like the only time they have to themselves is when they lock themselves in the bathroom or the closet or the shower. And usually, that involves tears and sometimes wine because they just don't feel like they can get any space away from anyone.

And then someone tells them, "You just need to practice good self-care," they kind of want to punch them in the throat. There's a little bit of that. So, can you help me understand your approach to self-care and what you find works for especially solo parents? That kind of thing?

Pam: Yeah, so, first of all, I think that we often have a misconception of what self-care is. So, a lot of people think it means going on a vacation or to a day spa and pampering yourself and spending lots of money or buying yourself a special treat or indulging in a, you know, big dessert, or I don't know.

But to me, self-care is just these everyday little tiny things that you do to take care of yourself. And the very first thing, I think, the most important

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thing is the way that you talk to yourself. It's taking care of yourself. And the way that we talk to ourselves as moms is sometimes so terrible, sometimes so mean. And you would never talk to a coworker or best friend or sister in the way that you talk to yourself. And I think that is the number one thing in self-care.

Krista: And that doesn't require anything.

Pam: Right, and it's so important. So, for me, that is like the number one. How are you talking to yourself when you make a mistake? What are the things that you tell yourself on a daily basis about yourself? And I do this with my clients. I have them write it out. What are the worst things you tell yourself on a daily basis? What are the best things you tell yourself on a daily basis?

And if you were to make positive, healthy self-talk a habit, how would that impact your life? And it's huge. So, I think that's the very first thing. But other things that are really small are just taking care of getting regular doctor's visits, you know, making sure you're all up to date with your doctor and your dentist and your OBGYN and all of those things. That's taking care of you. You do that for your kids so you've got to do it for you.

So, in the summertime, I did a five-day self-care challenge for moms and every day it was just a little thing. And the first thing that we started with was just getting dressed. So, because we're in this pandemic and many moms are home and they're just in their pajamas all day or they're in their sweats, so I said, "I want you guys to get dressed." And we had over 300 moms in the challenge. It was really fun.

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And so, some people, they just put on a necklace or they just put on some lip gloss. And they told me, “I felt better than I have in months.” It’s just the tiniest little thing and they’re like, “Well no one’s going to see me.” But you’re going to see you. You’re going to look in the mirror and say, “Okay, I feel more put-together now. I feel like a human,” you know?

And sometimes, we just out ourselves last on the list, and that’s not self-care. And another thing is just, like, say – and I know this is a really big one for moms, this is really hard. But saying no. Saying no to other adults or your kids and just being okay with taking care of yourself and not committing to something that you really don’t want to commit to.

Krista: Yes, and you know what I love, is that everything you just said, none of it really took any time and none of it really took any money. Or frankly – I don’t know, maybe some things take a little bit more energy. But once you get good at saying no when you mean no, instead of saying yes when you want to say no, it requires less energy once you get there.

Pam: Or you end up saying yes to something that you really want to say yes to also. Just think about, what do you want? And here’s another one is just when moms say, “I have to do it all. Everything’s on me. I have to do this. I need to do this.” And I’m sure you talk about this in your programs. Like, no. There’s nothing that you have to do; literally nothing you have to do. Even though it seems like everybody would tell you, “Yeah, you have to pick up your kid,” or even feed your kid – I have parents say to me, “I have to feed my kids.” And I’m like, no, in fact you don’t.

Krista: Yes, which sounds weird to say it that way, but it’s true, there really is nothing we have to do.

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Pam: There are many parents in the world who don't feed their kids. And it's not to say – of course, you want to feed your kids. You want to be that mom. But just tell yourself the truth about that. And tell yourself, I'm choosing to do this. I'm choosing to take my kid to soccer practice because I want them to have that experience. I don't have to."

And when you tell yourself the truth and you tell yourself, "I want to" or "I'm choosing to," it just changes your whole experience of it because you no longer feel resentful or obligated. You're making the choice. And that gives you all your power back.

Krista: Yes. Okay. I love all of this. Here's another thing I want your opinion on because this is something I hear all the time. Which is, my husband was more fun, the better parent, more wise, more mathematically inclined, more of something, the better disciplinarian. You name it. It's different for every mom. But pretty much every mom is looking at herself and comparing herself to her late husband and telling herself that he had something she doesn't have, and that's a problem. What are your thoughts?

Pam: Well, my thoughts are that he may have had different skills and different personality traits or whatever. But that's not a problem. Why are you the perfect parent and the perfect mom for your kids because of who you are? And maybe you can learn to do some of the same things that your husband brought to the relationship.

I teach my clients how to be more playful. Like, if the dad is always, "Oh, he's the fun one..." well you can become more fun. We can learn how to create the experience that we want but...

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Krista: Yeah, there's no fun gene that you have that you come out of the – you're either fun or you're not...

Pam: Right. And the other thing is, can you find other people in your life, in your children's lives who can fill that role? I think one of the most important things for parents who are single or solo parenting is to expand their support network and to accept help. And I think it's really hard for all moms to do this. But being able to look for other people in the child's life who can fill a particular role. Maybe it's an uncle.

I used to work for a big sister association. And I know there's a big brother association. So, like, there are people out there who want to be a male role model in kids' lives. And so, being able to find those people can be really – even a teacher, a coach, someone who is there to maybe fill the role that the husband or father would have filled.

Krista: Yeah, at least supplement. They'll never be able to fully fill... But yeah, I agree.

Pam: And bring that aspect of his personality into your child's life.

Krista: Yeah, and being willing to ask for help is so important. And not putting so much pressure on ourselves that we should be able to be all things to our children because it just simply isn't realistic.

Pam: Right. I think a lot of moms feel like asking for help is a sign of weakness or that they don't want to be a burden to other people. Maybe they don't even feel deserving of help. But I think that the opposite is so true, that asking for help actually makes you stronger. And other people get to help, which feels good. And it doesn't mean that you're always just

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accepting help. You can offer to help them if they help you in a certain situation. So, I think help is a beautiful thing.

Krista: I like what you said too because we do kind of forget, I think. It's easy to think that people are only helping us because they have pity, or to assume that we are somehow burdening them by asking them for help. But I love what you said because I do think that some people really genuinely want to help us. And it makes them feel good when they get to help us. And so, when we don't ask for help and we really could use it, we kind of rob people of the opportunity to be able to have those positive feelings that we all get when we help someone.

And so, it seems like we're just being selfish when we ask for help. But I think we could argue that the opposite is true too, that in a way it's kind of selfish when we deny someone the opportunity to help. So, I love that you brought that up.

Another thing you teach, which I want to know more about for myself and I want my listeners to hear it, you've mentioned the three core emotional needs and how to help kids meet those needs. Can you teach us about that?

Pam: Yeah, so all human beings really have these three core emotional needs and they drive our internal motivation. They give us a sense of purpose. And those are three Cs. They're very easy to remember because they all start with C. Connection, control, and competence. And the reason I teach this to my clients is that it's so important, when you child is behaving in a way that maybe you don't love, oftentimes it's because one of these three needs isn't being met.

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So, for example, if your kid is really needy and clingy or acting out, oftentimes it's because they need connection with you. They crave that connection and they're not getting it in some way, so they're going to act out in other ways in order to be able to meet that.

Or I have parents who say, "Well I'm always in a power struggle with my kid. They're always fighting and negotiating." Well, that's because they have a need for control. And kids don't have a lot of control over their own lives.

If you think about it, we as parents are making most of the decisions for them. And so, we need to give them some control over their own experience, some sense of personal power so that there will be fewer power struggles.

And the third is this need for competence, the need to feel like they're contributing to the family, that they are making a difference, that they're, you know, good at something. And I think when we are able to recognize, "Okay, what's their behavior telling me?" I always say, my child isn't being a problem, they're having a problem.

And think of it in that way. You can look to these three needs and say which of these is my child telling me that they're having a problem with or they're lacking in this particular area and how can I help them to meet that need.

Krista: Okay, so you said connection, so they need a connection with us...

Pam: Connection, control...

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Krista: So they want to control more elements of their life.

Pam: Yeah, and so giving them choices, you know, letting them – and not about everything, but little choices. When you have little kids it's like, "Okay, do you want to use the green bowl or the blue bowl?" These are big things to kids. I remember my kids having meltdowns over, "I got the green bowl and she got the..." it's like, okay... So, giving them some choice over that and then, as your kids get older, obviously you're going to want to give them bigger choices and giving them an allowance, for example, and letting them choose how they're going to spend it and become more independent and things like that.

But yeah, they need a sense of control over their lives. And when they don't get it, that's when you're going to see those power struggles start to appear in your relationships, because they're telling you, "I want some control. Give me control." And then the parent also wants the control, and that's where you get into a struggle.

Krista: Right, so connection, control, and competence. I loved what you said, that they're not a problem, they're having a problem. It's a very useful reframe there. Is there anything else that you think my moms need to hear or wish that we had talked about? Because this has all been so good.

Pam: I just think those two things that I think are most important are the self-talk and accepting help, I would say are the two main things that I think would be really helpful, even though accepting help or asking for help can be scary at times. It can make you feel vulnerable or fear, you know, looking a certain way. But I just think that they're really, really important, once you can get over your fear of asking, you're just going to feel so much better. And people really do want to help.

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Krista: And it can be anything. I think it can be – it doesn't have to be a big thing. Sometimes even the smallest things of just a little help here and there.

Pam: Exactly. I also want to mention that in the past couple of years, I've volunteered for a grief camp for kids. And it's called Experience Camps. They have five locations around the US and it's a weeklong camp for kids. I think the ages are like nine through 16 or 17. But it's just an amazing experience. It's a weeklong free program and it's all the things that summer camp should be.

It's all the physical activities and campfires and smores and sleeping in cabins and all those things. And there's a clinical element to it. So, I went as a clinician. Every bunk has a clinician and once a day or maybe twice a day, there's some kind of activity that has to do with their grief and processing their grief and things like that. But it's just an amazing program.

Everybody calls it the best week ever and it really is fun for the kids because here they are, you know, as moms – I know your moms feel like nobody understands and nobody gets me. But here, at this camp, all the kids have had a loss. Usually it's a parent, but it could also be a sibling or a primary caregiver. And so, everybody there knows these other kids get me. They get what I'm going through. They understand and I can talk about it with them.

And the camp is not at all a place where people go and they are sad. It's the exact opposite. They're having so much fun. There's so much joy and happiness. It's really incredible. So, I just wanted your listeners to know about it.

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Krista: Thank you. We'll link to that in the show notes. And I think it probably meets, as you said, those three core emotional needs. For sure connection.

Pam: Totally.

Krista: Just connecting to other people who kind of have walked a similar walk or that you relate to.

Pam: And the parents can also connect with other widows whose kids are going to the camp.

Krista: Love it. Speaking of connection, of course, people can listen to your podcast, which it's my favorite named podcast in the world, Less Drama More Mama. I love that podcast name. What is another way that you love to connect with people? Are you more Instagram, more Facebook?

Pam: I guess I'm more Instagram than Facebook. I'm not really huge on any social media platform. I am more Instagram these days. And the best way is my podcast, and then to work with me one on one. And I have a little group element happening now. So, basically, what I'm offering right now is working with me one on one. But I do also have a group that meets twice a month. So, when you work with me privately, you also get access to that.

Krista: That's nice. So, if people have questions, is the best way to just go to your website or email you or catch you on Instagram? What's your preference?

Pam: I guess email. [Pam@lessdramamoremama.com](mailto:Pam@lessdramamoremama.com).

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Krista: So simple, Less Drama... don't we all want that? Less drama and more of us, more calm...

Pam: More Mama...

Krista: More Mama. I love it. Pam, thank you so much for coming on the podcast today. I really appreciate it. You are a wealth of knowledge and thank you for sharing it with us.

Pam: Thank you, Krista.

Krista: Okay, you take care.

Pam: You too.

Krista: Okay, bye-bye.

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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](http://coachingwithkrista.com) and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.