

## Ep #80: Feelings Aren't Problems



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Krista St-Germain**

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

## Ep #80: Feelings Aren't Problems

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 80, Feelings Aren't Problems.

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 St-Germain: Hey, everyone. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. We're going to talk about feelings, and why they aren't problems. And I'm doing something a little bit different with this episode, which is that it is a recording of a presentation that I didn't do with the podcast in mind. But after I did it, I thought, "Oh, actually, this would be a really useful podcast episode." It's going to be a little bit longer than normal, but I think it's going to be super helpful to you. So, I hope you'll give it a listen.

Jamie, who you might remember from episode 66, surviving the first year. Jamie has been a client of mine for a little over a year now, as part of Mom Goes On, the original group, and then she's also done the master's group. And when her husband was sick, she benefited from participating in a program called Inheritance of Hope. And this year, their reunion because of COVID is online. And so, we both participated virtually with the workshop that you're about to hear. And so, the group we were talking to were mainly people who are going through a long-term illness. And so, what we talked to them about was feelings and why they matter, where they actually come from, the common myths that people have about feelings. We taught a process of how to handle feelings without trying to feel better. And then we also talked about how to teach your children to process feelings.

So, this is a little bit longer than our normal episode. And you won't be able to see the slides that Jamie and I were showing. But I do hope that you get a lot of value out of this, especially if you like me, are under the misconception that I used to be under, which is that feelings were problems, feelings were things we needed to fix, especially negative

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feelings. And if that is you, then this is your episode because in it you will learn, feelings are not problems to be solved. They are just experiences to be allowed. And you will come out really understanding exactly why that's true and exactly how to do that, how to allow feelings, so that you don't experience them as problems because they are part of life. All right, with that, we will get started. Enjoy.

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Krista St-Germain: All right. Welcome, everyone. So, excited to do this presentation with you. But sorry, I can't actually be there with you in person, but glad that, because I'm going to be out of town during your event, that we could record this.

So, welcome to Feelings Aren't Problems. I am Krista St-Germain. And I am a master certified life coach, and also a widow. That's kind of how I got into this work. My husband Hugo was killed little over four years ago in a car accident. He was hit while trying to change a tire on my car by a man that we later found out, had meth and alcohol in his system. So, it was a loss I didn't see coming, obviously threw me into my own grief experience. Not that losses that we see coming are worse or better than those that we don't, but definitely wasn't something I was prepared for.

And initially, I went to therapy that was really helpful in terms of being able to come to terms with a loss and unfurl myself from the fetal position. But ultimately what helped me the most, was life coaching. And so, that's what I do now is I work with women who are also widows and moms and help them figure out how to love life again. And one of my favorite parts of that is the feelings work. So, that's the work that I'm excited to share with you today. And then also, I will let her introduce herself, but Jamie, my cohost.

Jamie Gaylon: Yes, I am Jamie Gaylon. I live in Colorado. My family and I were served on the June 2018, IOH Retreat in Asheville. My husband Eric was diagnosed with stage four, colon cancer that January, and passed in July. So, we are now on the grief part of this journey. And I found Krista

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through Eric's cousin, and have been doing thought work through her widowed moms' group since last November.

Krista St-Germain: Almost a year.

Jamie Gaylon: I know.

Krista St-Germain: Where did the time go? Okay. So, what we're going to do is walk you through presentation on feelings. That's what we want to talk to you about, because we're always going to have feelings about our loss, right? They may change over time. That's our thoughts about our loss change over time. But since we will always have feelings about loss, what we want to work with you today on is to consider that if we stopped thinking about feelings as problems and got good at feeling them instead, that we could have a different experience of feelings, both for us and for our children.

So, we're going to walk you through this presentation. And then, because Jamie is available to stay with you live, then afterwards, she will field some questions. And I want to make myself available to any of you at any point in, so we'll make sure that you have my email information in case you also have questions for me directly.

But with that, we will jump in and talk about how it's possible that feelings might not actually be problems. So, what you're going to learn today, a few key points. The first is what feelings really are and why they matter. Because sometimes since we aren't taught very much about feelings, we just kind of gloss over them, and we make some assumptions that aren't so accurate. So, we're going to talk about what feelings are, why they matter, and also where feelings actually come from. It seems basic. I didn't know where feelings came from until I started doing this work. And so, we're going to cover that.

As well, I want to teach you some of the most common myths about feelings. So, we have picked five to work through today. And then we're

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going to walk you through a three-step process, so that you can handle your own feelings productively. But it's not about trying to feel better, meaning that we're not trying to make you happier. We're not trying to find the silver lining. We're not trying to change the ratio of positive to negative emotions. We're just trying to learn to handle the feelings that we already have in a more productive fashion. And once you're able to do that for yourself, then that will naturally better equip you to be able to help your children process their feelings as well. So, that's what you can expect today.

So first, what are feelings in the first place, right? Feelings are really just one-word terms that describe vibrations in our body. So, it seems really basic. Can we look at them like this, but happy, sad, angry, mad, scared, anxious, those kinds of one-word terms. And that's what we're talking about, when we're talking about feelings.

Just to give you a little point of reference, a chart that Jamie and I both like using this, is a little feelings chart. You can find it at [feelingswell.com](http://feelingswell.com). It's nothing I created. But it's a list of some of the many, and there are many, many, many more than this list gives us, feelings, right? So, maybe sometimes during grief, we're feeling confused. Maybe sometimes we're feeling guilty. Maybe sometimes we're actually feeling joyful, right? Or mad, all kinds of feelings. But they are one word, and they reflect what happens in our body when we have a thought.

So today, when we talk about feelings, I want you to consider that it's really the same as emotions. We're going to use those two terms, interchangeably, feelings, emotions, emotions, feelings. It doesn't really matter. But feelings are important because they really are what makes it interesting to be a human, right? Without feelings, even though when we're in the middle of a negative one, we don't really think that there's much value there. But without feelings, life would be pretty boring, right? It wouldn't really mean anything. And so, feelings are what make things kind of interesting as humans.

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When we're talking about negative feelings and positive feelings, I really want to consider those as air quotes. I use that term a lot. Because there really isn't anything negative about a feeling or positive about a feeling until we decide that there is as a human. And one could argue that actually both are necessary. And I do, because what I believe is that if we didn't have the "negative feelings," the positive feelings wouldn't mean anything. If we didn't know what it was like to be sad, we wouldn't know what it was like to be happy. Happiness wouldn't actually feel good. Right? So, a context is what makes the experience of emotion valuable.

So, all feelings then, because feelings are what give us context, really do add value to our experience. And what I don't want you to hear from this presentation is that we are trying to convince you to feel more positive feelings. That is not the point at all. What we want to help you do is figure out how to feel your feelings in a more productive, useful fashion, in a way that actually is in service of the life that you want to create, as opposed to, as something that actually creates more suffering.

I sometimes imagine what it would be like to not miss my husband. And it seems strange maybe to say that when you're really right in the middle of all of the emotions of grief, or maybe in that acute stage of grief, or anticipatory grief that you would actually imagine, not wanting to actually continue missing your spouse. But for me personally, if you could take away my ability to miss him, I wouldn't want that. It's natural. It's appropriate. My missing him is to me a sign that I loved him. And it feels good to me to miss him. Now, it's not something I want to define my life or to limit my life. But I believe that missing him as an important part of my experience with him since his passing. Jamie, anything you want to add to that,

Jamie Gaylon: That thought process has helped both my girls and I a lot, that we've talked about that thinking about things that like missing Eric, or being sad that he's not here, if you start thinking about what I want to be happy that he wasn't here, well, no, of course I don't want to be happy he's

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not here. And as soon as you start thinking of it that way, it feels less like you're trying desperately to change that emotion, that that emotion is appropriate and is no longer scary. And that the more that we try to fight those negatives, the worst they get. So, if we just accept them as negative, then they have less hold on us.

Krista St-Germain: Exactly. That's exactly it. We didn't really put this in the presentation, but just to give some context, I also believe that we can process emotions in a clean way. We can have a clean experience of painful emotions, or we can have a very dirty experience of negative emotion. And so, this is what I'm hoping that you will hear from us is how to take these feelings that you're having and process them in a way that is clean, in a way that avoids judgment of the feelings, judgment of self, in a way that doesn't pile on top of negative emotion, additional negative emotion, or in a way that doesn't diminish positive emotion through judgment. Right? So, if you're feeling joy, that you then don't judge your joy and make it mean something about your love for your person, and then experience guilt, right? When we learn to allow our feelings, we can do it in a clean way instead of adding unnecessary junk, and dirt to the process.

Jamie Gaylon: And about not forcing one or the other. Not forcing positive, when you're feeling "positive". When you're feeling negative or vice versa, not forcing yourself to feel some negative because you feel guilty about the positive. Just be accepting, whatever emotion you have and processing it instead of forcing a new emotion on yourself.

Krista St-Germain: Right. Because we can make room for all of them when we know how. Perfect. Okay. So, let's talk about, so that's what feelings are, right? They're just vibrations in the body. One word. And feelings come from thoughts. And this might be news. This was news to me. So, this might be news to you.

Krista St-Germain: Feelings don't actually come from what happens to us. Feelings come from the thoughts that we have in our mind, what we make, what happens to us mean. So, this is important to know. Feelings start in

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our mind, and we experience them in our bodies, which is different from sensations. So, let me give you an example, and then I'm going to explain sensations. So this is an example. So, something happens in the world, in this case, a political candidate gives a speech, which we might be familiar with right now. Any particular political candidate, we shall not name names, because it really is irrelevant, gives us speech. That happens, that is outside of us, right? We can't control that. It's something that happens in the world.

That political candidate speech does not make us feel anything until we have a thought about it. And here's why, one person might think about that political candidate. And I have presidential candidates in my mind, both of which are male. So, one person might think, "I love him." Right? And that thought that sentence, I love him, would then make that person feel excited. So, one thought makes one person feel excited.

But then another person watching the same identical political candidate and hearing the same speech might have a different thought, "I hate him." And then that person might experience the emotion of frustration. So, it would often seem like it is what happens outside of us, i.e., the political candidate giving the speech that makes a person feel a feeling. But we all have different emotional experiences of the same facts, the same circumstance, the same thing. And the reason for that is because we all interpret it differently.

Thoughts are not right or wrong. They're not good or bad. So, we're not trying to suggest that you should think in any particular way, or you should feel in any particular way, or that you should not think in any particular way or feeling any particular way. It's just to say that we're all having different emotional experiences of different things, because we're all having different thoughts about it, even death, right? So, I always like to teach that.

When my husband died, I experienced a lot of negative emotion, but it wasn't because of the actual death, it was because of my thoughts about that death, which for me felt very appropriate. But another person, Jamie,

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for example, did not experience the negative emotion that I did, when my husband died, because her thoughts about it were different. She didn't even know who he was. We didn't even know each other, but yet that happened in the world. He died. Right? And she was emotionally unaffected. Whereas I had a lot of thoughts about it. And so, I had a lot of feelings about it. And then the same thing, of course, when Jamie's husband died. I didn't know her at that point. I didn't really have any thoughts about his death. And if I had, they wouldn't have been the same thoughts that I had when my own husband died. So, it's not to say that we're supposed to think in any particular way. It's just to illustrate that really where feelings come from his thoughts in our mind.

And so, the goal isn't to change our feelings, it's just to understand where the feelings come from. And that that will be different for different people in our lives. Because when we understand that someone else's experience might be different from ours, because they are thinking differently than we are thinking, then we can support ourselves better. We don't have to get other people to understand our thoughts or think the same thoughts we're thinking. And we're more accepting of the different emotional experience that other people might be having of this loss, knowing that they'll just be thinking differently about it. So, it's important that we understand thoughts cause feelings.

Sensations are a little different. So, when I'm talking about feelings, I'm talking about something that again, starts in the mind and then is experienced in the body, versus a physical sensation, which starts in the body, and then is experienced in the mind. So, for instance, hunger, thirst, pain. If you touch a stove, you will experience that sensation of heat, first in your body. And then your body will send a message to your brain to remove your finger from the stove. That is a sensation. Sensations are not caused by thoughts. Sensations are things that happen in the body. And then we become aware of them in the brain, versus feelings, which start in the brain. And then we notice them in our body.

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So again, because feelings are caused by thinking, then we're all having a different emotional experience, even if our circumstances are the same. We can be in the same room, right? It can be the same person that died, but everyone in the family is having different thoughts about what that means to them. So, example number two, is one that Jamie will give you from her life.

Jamie Gaylon: Yes. So, just recently took me a little while to clear out Eric's closet from his clothes. So, his closet is right next to my sink, and it was still filled with his clothes. So, the thought works, speak, that was my circumstance. That was what was happening in the world, was his clothes were in his closet. My thoughts about that were, "I don't want to see his clothes every morning and every night when I brush my teeth." Like I said, the closet is here, and the sink is here. So, I felt determined. It was the emotion that I felt to try to clean it out and clear it, so that I wouldn't be seeing it first thing and last thing, every day. But my girls were thinking, "We can't get rid of daddy's clothes." And they were really worried about giving it away. They were maybe even scared about getting rid of daddy's clothes. That felt scary to them. That felt permanent to them. And so, the clothes were the same, the circumstance of the situation were the same, but our thoughts about the circumstance gave us very different feelings with regards to those clothes.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And so, when we're better able to understand why someone feels differently than we do, just helps us make sense of things a little bit better. It helps us show a little more compassion to ourselves. It helps us show more compassion to other people. And when we settle into the idea that you can't think your daughter's thoughts, right? Then you also can't control their feelings. And you can decide to do something different with Eric's clothes. And you might find that both of your daughters individually, then even still think differently about what you've done, and feel differently about what you've done. So, we can relax a bit and stop trying to control people's emotions when we settle into the truth,

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which is that, unless we can think their thoughts, we can't change their emotions.

Jamie Gaylon: Right. Once we learn how to process the feelings, which is coming up, then there's less of a need to change. Because I think before this work, I would have felt the need to change their thoughts about it, to try to convince them that I was right and that they needed to be okay with it. And instead, once you learn to process those feelings, I was able to allow that feeling for them and help them process that feeling, instead of trying to change the way they saw the situation.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. So good. Yeah. And you realized too that, we'll get to this later, but when you don't believe feelings are problems, then we become less graspy about how those around us are feeling. We don't worry about changing it so much or trying to, because we see it as less of a problem than most of us do initially. So, jumping ahead a little bit.

Speaking of myths about feelings, one of the first myths about feelings that we often have is that they're contagious. And I think a lot of our popular language speaks to this. So, sometimes we talk about people being toxic. You'll hear that phrase a lot, "Our work environment is being toxic." Which implies that if someone is feeling in a particular way, that others in their physical proximity could somehow catch that feeling. But feelings are not contagious. They are not a virus, right? They are caused by thoughts, and therefore can only be experienced by the person thinking those thoughts. So, everyone in the room is feeling sad. It's not because one person felt sad and then it carried, right? It's because everyone is individually thinking something that is generating the emotion of sad for them.

So, if you notice that everyone is feeling stressed in your family, what I hope you will hear from this is that you may have been stressed first, but it's not your fault that everybody is also feeling stressed. It doesn't mean you did anything wrong. It doesn't mean your stress carried onto your family, because really feelings are caused by thoughts. So, only we can experience them.

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Second myth is that there are feelings we should have and feelings we shouldn't have. Obviously, I'm going to teach this as false. I believe feelings aren't right or wrong, or good or bad. And they can't hurt us at all. So, to tell ourselves that there are some feelings we should have and some feelings we shouldn't have, incredibly unuseful, and can contribute to our suffering quite a bit. Jamie, anything you want to add there?

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah. And I think, I mean, we'll get to that more. But the more that we think a feeling is right or wrong and try to force it, the more that it comes back tenfold.

Krista St-Germain: Right. Yeah. What we resist persists. And what I want to offer to you is that all feelings really are okay. And sometimes we're prepared in grief for the "negative feelings". But I also want to offer that even the positive ones are also okay, like relief. Sometimes we feel a tremendous amount of relief. And then we judge ourselves for feeling relief. And we make it mean that we didn't love our person enough or that we wished for them to die. And that is simply not true.

Some thoughts, maybe if you were in extended caregiving situation or maybe you watch them suffer, and once they pass you think thoughts that create relief, that does not mean anything about your love for your person, that does not mean you wish them to die. None of that is true. All feelings are okay even relief. Joy as well. You might notice yourself smiling or being happy. And then you might notice yourself wanting to make that mean something about your love for your person. I know Jamie, maybe you can speak to your experience here because I know we've had those conversations about you and Eric.

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah. I experienced that. The most vivid one was last Christmas, when it's the first Christmas without him. And I had a lot of dread leading up to it, thinking the holidays are going to be horrible. And then the day itself was really beautiful and really joyful. And then the day after, my brain wanted to offer a lot of thoughts about how I really shouldn't have had a good day on Christmas, that that meant a lot of bad things

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about my relationship with Eric and how much I loved him. And so, I took away from my own joy by feeling guilt about it, instead of just experiencing the joy and knowing that that was, as much a part of the grief journey as the sadness is.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And then sometimes we do the opposite where, based on our thoughts about the magical qualities of time that I think some of us are led to believe time will pass. And we will notice that we feel a negative emotion. And then we will judge ourselves for how we perceive that we're handling our healing. And we'll tell ourselves we should be farther along, or we don't have it together, or there's something wrong with us, or we're never going to be truly happy again. We have all these judgments that we place on top of feelings. We tell ourselves we should be past or should no longer be experiencing. Also, not so useful, and buys into this myth about feelings that we should have and feelings that we shouldn't, which just isn't accurate.

Okay. We also, most of us because we just, I know for me, I was never taught until I discovered coaching. Specifically for me, I was never taught how to appropriately handle feelings, just left on my own. In fact, if anything I was taught about feelings, it was to tell someone, "When you say this, I feel that. Right? It makes me feel this." Right? To attribute my feelings to someone else's behavior, but certainly never taught that feelings weren't problems.

When we step back, and we consider that feelings really are just vibrations in our body caused by chemicals that release after we have a thought. They are not problems. They are a valuable part of our human experience. And if we can reframe that for ourselves and see that even the ones that we associate with terrible, awful situations in life, still really aren't problems, then our experience of them will change. I believe that they are a natural part of being human. We want to have feelings. If we didn't have feelings, the ups and the downs, it would be weird, it would be a fairly boring experience, right? It would almost be like... Imagine just walking around

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being neutral all the time, you would never be happy. The birth of a child or a grandchild, or something that you want to celebrate, it wouldn't feel like anything. And we have to have the negative to be able to experience the positive. So, all of it's part of our being human. And we want to shift and move from it's a problem to be solved, to it's an experience to be allowed.

Jamie Gaylon: And this one was big for me as a mom, that I thought the girls' negative "emotions" were things I needed to solve. If they were mad, it was a problem and we needed to fix it. And if they were sad, it was a problem and we needed to fix it. And since learning that it is not a problem, that experience has changed dramatically for all three of us.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And then your role as the parent becomes, how do I support them as they experience this feeling, knowing that it's not going to hurt them. And the path of least resistance is to allow. So, instead of how do I change their feelings? It's how do I support them as they experience their feeling? And then we're not trying to do the impossible, because in order for you to change your daughter's feelings, you would literally have to remove the thoughts from their brain that caused the feeling, and then implant new thoughts into their brain, which none of us can do. It's an impossible task. And often what our children hear when we communicate inadvertently that it's a problem. They hear that, they shouldn't be feeling what they're feeling, right? And then we minimize their emotional experience, which is nobody likes to be invalidated or minimized.

So, feelings aren't problems, they are experiences to be allowed. We also tend to think, and we are taught this as a culture when it comes to grief, that if we just avoid feelings, they will go away. So, I know I was told so many times after Hugo died, "Well, just keep busy, just keep busy." As though keeping busy would somehow prevent me from having to feel feelings, that they would just over a certain period of time dissipate. And I could just distract my way out of them. It does not work that way at all.

We're also taught that if we will just let enough time pass that feelings will change. But I don't believe time does anything for feelings. What changes

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over time might be our thinking. And therefore we have a different emotional experience. But just putting our head in the sand and avoiding feelings is not helpful.

Truly, if we resist something, it persists. And feelings, especially in grief, they do wait for us. So, we can either deal with them as they arrive and learn to be productive about it or try to keep kicking the can. But either way, we're probably not going to get out of the feelings work. And so, I think that our best, that is just to figure out how to deal with them productively in the moment. Anything you want to add?

Jamie Gaylon: Nope. Yep.

Krista St-Germain: Okay. And then this one, I sometimes I wish I had written down all of the well-intentioned advice that people gave me after Hugo died. But we're told this, we tell ourselves this. Sometimes people tell our children this, "We should be strong. We should be strong for our kids. We shouldn't show our emotions in front of them." Sometimes people will tell our children, "Be strong for mommy. Be strong for daddy." And we're really doing ourselves a disservice here because when we buy into this myth, then we end up trying to hide what's really happening for us, which contributes to the idea, it feeds the myth that feelings are problems, instead of normalizing them and just helping everybody around us, honestly, handle what's truly going on for us. We start hiding. And then we start isolating and trying to deal with these things behind closed doors, which contributes to the idea of, especially for our children, that feelings are problems.

Versus when we learn how to role model, what it's like to process and allow a feeling, then we're contributing to the idea that feelings aren't problems, that we're having them, that it's okay to have them. And then we can model that for our children. Because if we aren't okay with our feelings and we're implying that feelings are a problem, guess what our children are going to hear? They're going to hear that their emotions are problems too. And that there is something they should hide. And then they won't get in on learning

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this skill, which will not only serve them in grief, but it will serve them for the rest of their lives. Add anything?

Jamie Gaylon: I think that when Eric was sick, I spent a lot of time trying to be strong, trying not to show them how scared I was, trying not to show them how sad I was, that I thought the first myth was true, that it was contagious. Right? And since then, I've realized how much it helps them, even though it might initially give them thoughts that it's scary, that mommy is sad or that it is a problem. That now they see me joyful, sad, angry, frustrated, whatever it is, and can see that it's okay. That's where I am right now. And it has allowed them to do the same. That it's not a problem.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. Thinking about my youngest, who's now 13. He's just always been a little more sensitive. And since he was little, he's very aware of how I was feeling. And especially after Hugo died, he would notice when I was sad. And he would say, "Mommy, I want to make you happy. Mommy I know, I can see that you're sad. You seem sad." And so, to normalize that for him, I did a lot of, "Buddy, whose job is it to make mommy happy?" Because I would teach him this, right? "It's not your job. You can't do it. I cause my own happiness. Mommy causes her own happiness. So, your job is just to be you. Right? And my job is to make me happy. It is not your job. And it's okay when we're not feeling happy. We don't have to feel happy all the time." Right? And teaching him, because he really did think there was something, he could do to create my happiness and was perhaps responsible for my sadness, which is just not a useful message for kids at all.

Okay. So, there are kind of three common responses that most of us default to, because we're not taught any better. I'm going to teach you those three common responses. And then we're going to go into the fourth response, which is the productive one that we really want to encourage everyone to consider.

So, the first is where we resist. It's where we notice usually a negative feeling, sometimes a positive one though, but typically a negative one. And

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when we notice that we tell ourselves that it's a problem. Often, we judge it or judge ourselves for having it. We tell ourselves we shouldn't feel the way that we feel. So, maybe it's a negative emotion, but maybe it's joy. And we're telling ourselves we shouldn't be joyful. If it's negative, sometimes we end up trying to find a silver lining or we tell ourselves we should be grateful. And we start willfully trying to find gratitude, but we really are just resisting the actual emotion that we've noticed. And we're trying to cover it up with something else to replace it with something else.

So, I like to imagine that when we're in resistance, it's like having a beach ball in the water. And we're taking that beach ball, and if you've ever done this before, you know what this is like, and we're trying to shove it under the water, which we can do for short periods of time, but it's a lot of work. And it takes a lot of energy, and we don't have an infinite amount of energy or willpower. So, we can only do it for so long. So, just like shoving a beach ball under water eventually has the beach ball popping up, right? Because we add energy to it. And we eventually run out of our ability to hold it. And that beach ball comes up and it can smack us in the face. And what we resist then, really is persisting. I know Jamie, this was a big one for you.

Jamie Gaylon: Resistance was my go-to. And the beach ball analogy has come up for me so many times. For me, one of the biggest ones was in social situations, especially during that acute phase that I felt like I was holding that beach ball under water the entire time I was out with other people. And at some point, I just, I lost it, and it came up and smacked me in the face in a huge way. And I would, basically run for it, right? I'd be at a get together, and it'd be like, all of a sudden, I was done, and I headed to the car, and I sobbed the whole way home. Even though I wasn't feeling that way when I got there, it was because I was trying so hard to hold that beach ball under water and be something, be in an emotional state that I wasn't naturally in. So, that analogy has helped me greatly to see how resistance works.

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Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And it makes complete sense that if we're socialized to believe that feelings are problems, then when we notice them, we're going to want to get away from them. Right? And it's just not always a productive thing to do.

So, then second, when we notice an emotion, often we react, and we really don't even think consciously, we just let the emotion fuel our actions, our behavior. So, an example is that, if we feel angry, we might yell. Now, neither one of these are the only option, right? So, this is what we want to help you understand, is that we can still notice the emotions and not let them fuel our behavior, but also not resist them. And then also not do the third one, which is to avoid or numb.

And when it comes to avoiding or numbing, it usually happens with what I call the overs. And that shows up differently for different people. But often when we're trying to get away from an emotion, we will distract ourselves with a behavior, and we will overdo something. So, maybe we suddenly start overworking, right? We throw ourselves into a project.

There's a woman in our group right now who just finished a massive fundraiser for her husband. And she's really glad that she did that fundraiser. But she could tell as it grew close to the end of that fundraiser, that she had gone straight from his death to completely throwing herself into this fundraiser. And because it was really done to excess, she wasn't really able to do the feelings part of things, because this was how she was getting out of it, was just a busy herself away from those feelings.

Some of us turn to food, and we eat for comfort. We eat to get away from those emotions. We might turn to alcohol. We might spend, shop. I did a lot of shopping after Hugo died. Like Amazon, all of a sudden was the answer to a lot of the feelings I was having. Sometimes we sleep a lot more than our body actually needs, because it's just in our mind a way to not feel so awful, so just to go to bed. Or we do a lot of social media, kind of mind-numbing phone use, and distract ourselves with Facebook, Instagram, and sometimes games too. So, avoiding and numbing, enables us to just kind

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of kick the can down the road, and instead of actually processing the feelings that we're having, so we just distract ourselves. Anything you want to add, Jamie?

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah, I think the biggest thing is for me is when I noticed myself avoiding or numbing, that that feeling is still sitting there at the end of that. Right? It hasn't changed at all. For me, a lot of times it's TV, I over Netflix. And so, I might have an emotion that I'm not willing to feel, I turn on the TV. When I turn off the TV, that's feeling is still there. It hasn't gone anywhere. It hasn't lessened. It hasn't changed. It's just right where it was when I turned on the TV. So, it doesn't move us forward at all to avoid it.

Krista St-Germain: Right. And the avoiding and numbing that is most concerning is the kind that creates some sort of a consequence in life that we don't want. Right? So, that we can actually avoid in a very healthy way. And dual process theory of grief teaches us this, that we can oscillate, and it's useful to our brain to oscillate back and forth between doing the "work of grief" and finding a distraction from it.

So, please don't hear us say that you should never watch Netflix or do anything of fun, and you should only feel your feelings all the time, because that's not what we're saying at all. You actually do want to find respite for yourself, from all of the feelings that you're having, but do it intentionally, consciously, purposefully. So, try to find activities. It's very different when you're planning in advance. And you're investing in self-care through a hobby or intentional watching of Netflix, right? Which is so much different than all of a sudden you look up at the clock and hours have gone by, and you haven't been present in your life, accidentally because you were trying to get away from the feelings. That's what I'm talking about here. I'm all in for any sort of healthy avoidance that gives your brain some respite from all of the work that we associate with grief, but let's do it on purpose, as opposed to just not having coping skills and turning to behaviors to avoid or numb, which is different.

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Okay. So, the fourth one, which is what we're going to spend a little bit more time focusing on here is how to actually allow and process feelings, right? And that comes with the foundation that they aren't problems to be solved. They are just experiences to be allowed. And when we know that and we open up to them, and let them flow through us, we have a completely different experience. We don't need to resist or react or avoid because now we have a way to handle them appropriately.

So, this is what I call the NOW process. I like acronyms because they help me remember things. So I call this the NOW process or how to feel better now. Now, again, I don't mean how to feel a different emotion. I don't mean how to go from sad to happy. I mean, how to look at the emotion that you're feeling right now and feel it, allow it, process it, so that you get through it to the other side. It's not about feeling a different emotion. It's about feeling better, the emotion you're already feeling.

I know it will be a little bit counterintuitive and I know it will be a little bit awkward. And I don't think most of my clients love me when I make them start with the feelings work. I don't know how you thought about it, Jamie. But I just want to offer that it is awkward, and it is counterintuitive. And I embrace that, and I hope that you will to.

So, here's how it works. So, the N in NOW stands for name it. And that just means, give it a word. This is anger. This is sadness. This is guilt. This is despair. This is hopelessness. Whatever it is for you, name it. And really, I'm even less interested. This is probably the part that I am least interested in you doing with great specificity, because as long as you're recognizing that it is an emotion there's value, even in that, right? "Oh, this is, I'm feeling something." Even if you aren't able to give it a name, but you just recognize that you're having a feeling, that is also useful. So, name it or notice it is fine.

Then the O in NOW stands for open. Open up to it. And this is probably the most counterintuitive part, because since none of us have really ever had any experience allowing our feelings, and since we're socialized to believe

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that they are problem, our natural inclination is to want to get away. Right? And the primitive part of our brain that for as long as we've existed has believed and kept us in survival mode by avoiding our pain, right? Seek pleasure, avoid pain, be efficient. That's the wiring of our primitive brain. Everything in our being will want to get away from this emotion. So, we have to know that, that we're programmed in that way, and then actually choose to open up to it. So we say, yes. If you notice your shoulders are pulling away or you're coming down, it really does mean open your body up to it. Right? Breathe it in.

I know this idea of being a screen instead of a dam has helped Jamie. I'll let her talk about that. But it really is just a vibration in your body. And so, when you say yes to it, you're going to be able to process it faster. Jamie, do you want to talk about being a screen instead of a dam?

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah. It's apparently, analogies helped me a lot. So for me, the screen idea really helps. And now the girls and I both will look at each other and say, "Okay, be a screen." But the idea that if you are a piece of wood and you try to dam up the emotion, the emotion, the water is going to run against that board over and over until the board breaks. And it does damage. We've been saying feelings can't hurt you, but in that case, I mean, it doesn't physically hurt you, but it does hurt more. Whereas if you're just a screen across the water and you let the water flow through you, it flows through you without doing damage and doesn't stay there for as long. It allows it to pass.

And so, my experience when I am good at being a screen of a "negative emotion" is so much more peaceful and accepting than when I'm trying to be a dam. And I'm trying to, again, resist that emotion.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. So much. And so, maybe some of the moms watching this might relate a little bit. If you are a mom, you probably didn't go into the experience of childbirth expecting no pain. Now, you may have asked for an epidural, right? But we know that panicking, resisting labor pains does not contribute, right? It actually, it makes things worse. And so,

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we want to consider this same approach to emotions. Nobody ever suggested feelings are easy, ever. But when we can open up to them and allow them to be what they are, they are easier, right? Because we are not in resistance and we are not adding fuel to the fire through resistance. So, we want to just open up to whatever that feeling is.

And then the W in NOW is to witness. So, we want to witness the experience in our body, remembering that thoughts cause feelings and feelings are really just the chemical experience that we have. Once we have a thought, our brain releases some chemicals, and then we notice those chemicals in our body. So, we want to go almost a little bit out of body, if you will. We're trying to witness what we are experiencing in our body as objectively as possible.

So, instead of continuing to think about the feeling or think about the thoughts causing the feeling, we're really just going to the body and noticing the experience of the feeling in the body. So, where is it? Is there a particular part of your body that is calling to you, that you are noticing this emotion in? What's happening in that part of your body? Is it a fast vibration that you're noticing? Maybe it's a little bit more slow. Does it feel hard? Does it feel soft? If you had to give it a shape, what shape would it be? Does it have a particular color? Is it more rough or more smooth, or more bumpy? Is it bigger, smaller? Is it the size of fist? Or is it taking up your entire chest? Does it make you want to move? Does it move around? What's happening?

And if we really go to that watcher witness place, then what we'll see is that the chemicals usually process faster than we think. Typically about a minute and a half, once you've had a thought, we can follow that feeling all the way through our body. Now, of course, if we think that thought again, or we keep hanging out with that thought, we'll still keep noticing the feeling keeps coming back. But also not a problem. We just want to notice what's happening in our body without resistance. So, some examples, yeah, from real life.

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Jamie Gaylon: Oh, sorry. At least for my girls, they are much better at the, what color is it? What texture is it? The questions than I am. I have a tendency to get stuck on like, "I don't know. I can't. And I have to really be open to it. And the girls are much better at saying, "It's red and it's pokey. And it looks like Mico's dog ball." They know these things better than I do.

Krista St-Germain: Well, and I find that same thing is true with me and with my kids too. But I don't want people to worry too much about it. It really doesn't matter the answers to those questions, because feelings will feel different to every person. And that's fine. What matters is that we get ourselves into this place where we're just willing to witness the experience and let it happen. And then how it shows up, it doesn't matter.

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah. And for me, it did help to start. For me in the beginning I had a lot of anxiety, and the witnessing part allowed me to at some point be able to go, "Oh, that's anxiety. Wonder why that's there." And not just feel like, "Oh, I just feel bad. And I don't know why." To be able to go, "Oh, I know that feeling. That's anxiety. Okay. Now, I can deal with that."

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And repetition of this gives confidence, the more times you do it. In my coaching program I ask, not sure how many of people comply, but I highly recommend that we get the hang of this by doing it a hundred times, right? That we actually try to go for the goal of feeling a hundred feelings. Because when we do that, our relationship with feelings change. It's so much easier to not believe their problems, when we have experience under our belt of hanging out with the feeling for a minute and a half and supporting ourselves through it. And then we realize, "Oh, wow, actually I didn't go down a black hole and never come out." Because that's what a lot of us think, right? "If I allow myself to feel angry, I'll just scream." No, actually, when you don't allow yourself to feel angry, that's when you're more likely to scream, right?

When you don't allow yourself to feel the feeling, that's when you circle down the toilet and go into the black hole. But when you get some

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confidence that you can have a feeling that you may not love it, but it's not going to take you anywhere terrible. And if you just tune into what's happening in your body and you stop saying no to it, then feelings won't be that big of a deal anymore. And when they're not that big of a deal for you anymore, you can help them not be that big of a deal for your children anymore. Yeah. So Jamie, I know we had talked about what happened when Alex came home from school, and then tell that story.

Jamie Gaylon: Oh yes. So, Alex is a freshman this year, she's been doing remote learning, but she went to an in-person art club. And she called me and said, "It's a disaster. You need to pick me up." So I went, picked her up, brought her home. And she was beside herself, sobbing, sobbing, sobbing. And I think my instinct as a mom is to say, "Whoa, Whoa, Whoa, what's going on? Tell me all about it. Let me fix it. Let me tell you why it's not as bad as you think it is. Let me talk you out of this." And through the process of learning how to feel feelings, instead, we sat down, and I said, "Tell me what you're feeling." And she's used to this now. So she immediately was like, "Well, I don't know. I'm embarrassed. I'm upset." It was a whole slew of emotions.

And I said, "Okay, can you be a screen? Can you just let that be there?" And instead of talking to her about the specifics of the event, we talked about the feelings, "Sit down. Let's feel that, just feel it for a minute. What's it feel like? Where's it at?" And sometimes she doesn't want to tell me where it's at in her body. But the main part is for me to just sit with her and let her have her feelings, and let her process those feelings before we talk about what caused the feelings and what we should maybe do to fix any problems that were at art club, not the problems with feelings, but what led to the feelings. And if I let her process those first, then we can have a conversation that is actually productive. Whereas if I just immediately jump into that conversation, it's not going anywhere productive.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. It's a good thing to remember is that when emotions are high, intellect is low. It's very difficult for all of us to think

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clearly when our emotions are high. We just don't have access to be able to process. So, whether it's our own emotions, our children's emotions, our best bet is to get them grounded and back in their body. Right? And processing what's actually happening in their body and in touch with that. And then later from that place, we can have a conversation about what's happening, not with the intention of changing the feelings though, to your point.

Yeah. And then an example for how this has worked for me and for my kids. When Carson started middle school, he was quite anxious about it. It was about a year after Hugo died. And was the night before we were laying in his bed and he was really upset. And we had gone and practiced how to walk around the school and find his locker. And I mean, we'd done this a lot. So, I saw the anxiety building with him. But the night before it was pretty bad. And so, instead of trying to change it and say, "Don't feel anxious. We've already gone and walked around a million times and there's nothing to be afraid of. And you can totally handle it." I didn't try to change any of his feelings, but what helped him was when I just asked him to describe what he was feeling in his body, "What is this feeling that you're having?"

And I remember it was like a purple octagon or something very specific that he got to, just like you said, Jamie, your girls are very specific. He's very specific. And so, we just talked about what it would be like that probably lots of other kids were feeling anxious about starting middle school too. And what would it be like to just take that purple, fuzzy octagon, or however he described it and just carry it with us in the backpack tomorrow? Could we just do that? And maybe if we thought about it that way, it wouldn't seem like such a big deal. And so again, it's making peace with what we're feeling, as opposed to trying to change what we're feeling, and doing that by describing what's happening in the body.

So, my recommendation for you is that you give this a shot for yourself first. And use the goal that I use with my clients, is set a target of how many feelings you want to allow. Because then what will happen is that when you

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notice the feeling, it's easier to switch your brain from, "Alert, alert, abort, abort, problem, problem." To, "Oh, here it is. Here's one. This is my opportunity to figure this out for myself." And then we start to have a different experience of feelings when we notice them. We start to associate them more with opportunities and less with problems. And so, if it's not a hundred fine, but pick a number. And I challenge you to actually try to hit that number. How many feelings can you collect? You can even if you'd like, create a little jar for yourself.

I had one of my clients, she used Legos. And she took an empty glass and a bunch of Legos. And every time she felt a feeling, she allowed it to be there and she followed the NOW process. She would put a Lego in the glass. And then she watched. And for her, it was symbolic of the things that you build and her relationship with her kids and so on with, I guess. So, practice it yourself first. And then you can walk your children through it because you will have some confidence and skill around it. So again, when we stop thinking of feelings as problems, and we start thinking of them as experiences to be allowed, then we can model the philosophy for others.

All right. So, these are some phrases you may notice, you tell yourself, you may notice, you are inclined to tell your kids. You may notice other people are telling them to you. And again, it's not right or wrong. It's not good or bad. But I want to draw your attention to them so that you consider thoughtfully what they might be creating for you and for those that you love. So, don't feel angry. Again, this thought is based on the idea that there are feelings that we should and shouldn't have, right?

So, when we tell ourselves we shouldn't feel any emotion, I just picked angry, but we can put any emotion in there. Don't feel relief. Don't feel joy. Don't feel guilt. Don't feel happy. We're really telling ourselves that there are some feelings that are good and some feelings that are bad. You'll feel better soon, assumes that time is going to change our emotional experience. But if thoughts cause feelings, then unless we think differently, we aren't going to be feeling any differently.

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And it also assumes again, that feelings are problems and that we should try to feel better. Maybe that doesn't really serve us. I see a lot of forced gratitude in grief that we should feel grateful. And I see us comparing our loss to the losses of other people and comparing our lives to the lives of other people. So unuseful, in my opinion.

If you want to be grateful, I'm all in on finding reasons to be grateful, but do it because you want to be grateful. Don't do it because you are telling yourself, you should be grateful. Because usually when we're thinking a thought with the word should in it, you start feeling resistance and we start feeling obligated. And it doesn't actually feel all that great, even though it seems like it might be a noble thought. Jamie, if you want to jump in on any of these, feel free?

Be strong. Again, I'm an advocate be who you are, feel as you feel. Whatever is going on for you, you get to choose who you want to share it with. But whatever feeling you're feeling is fine, it's okay. It's a part of your life experience, and that's valuable. So, no need to fake it. Certainly not for your kids. You get to decide who you want to bring in on your emotional experience, but it doesn't have to come from a phony place.

Keeping busy, again, assumes that time we'll change our emotions, and it doesn't. And again, it assumes that emotions are bad. They wouldn't want you to be sad. People say these things and we say these things often because we're not bought in on the idea that feelings are problems. And we don't know how to let other people have their own feelings. So, naturally we want to change the emotional experience of another. We don't understand how to feel good when somebody else feels bad. So, we try to make them feel good, because we think that's the answer to us feeling good. But it's entirely possible that we can have someone with us, a child, anyone, and they can feel whatever it is that's real for them, sad, angry. It isn't contagious. It's not going to rub off on us and it's not a problem.

So, we can each have our own emotional experiences and just witness the other person's. And it's such a more enjoyable experience that way. "You're

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young. They're in a better place. It was God's plan," all of these things again, take what works for you. Try on a thought and see how it feels. And if it feels good to you, keep it. But know that different thoughts feel differently to different people. And so, if a thought that someone offers you or that you notice in your own mind doesn't feel good to you, just because it might be what you were socialized to believe or what your religion taught, or it might sound noble. It might even be things that lots of people would agree on. If it doesn't make you feel good, you don't have to keep thinking it.

Thoughts will show up in our mind. And we don't have to keep thinking them just because they show up. People will say things to us, and we don't have to keep thinking them, if they don't feel good to us. Right? I know how you feel. Even I, this one, I know what it feels like to have lost my husband. I don't know what it feels like to have lost Jamie's husband. And arguably, similar losses from the outsider's perspective, but I know how I feel, and I know what it feels like to feel terrible. And I don't really ever know how someone else feels.

I used to tell myself all the time it could have been worse. My daughter could have been in that accident. My son could have been in that accident, and it could have been worse. It seems like a noble thought, but man, it made me feel terrible because it really just invalidated that it was awful. Right? Like instead of telling myself it could have been worse, it sometimes actually did feel better thinking that. But most of the time I didn't.

So again, if a thought like that makes you feel better and provides you some relief, keep it. If it doesn't though, you can dismiss it. And then we've already talked about time heals. Jamie, anything you want to add?

Jamie Gaylon: I think the two that's tricked me were both, "I know how you feel. And it could have been worse." Both for me like, "I know how you feel." It's usually followed by the, because. My younger daughter came home and said, someone told her she knew how she felt because her hamster had died. And it was like, okay, so we had to talk about how that

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was the best of intentions. And we know it doesn't feel the same. But the fact is that her hamster dying did make her feel sad. So, but usually I feel like it's followed by a story from their life that makes me feel like, "Yeah, no, you don't get it." That never feels good to hear.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah.

Jamie Gaylon: And the, "It could have been worse." I've thought that a few times since losing Eric, I've heard people with much lengthier illnesses saying, "Well, it could have been worse," because they were sick for longer. And a lot of times my brain offers a, "Yeah. And you had longer with them." And so, I just feel like it's always both of those statements always come with comparisons, that either you're telling yourself my grief shouldn't be as bad as it is because it could be worse. No, that doesn't help. Or someone else's telling you your grief shouldn't be as big as it is because it could have been worse, than either way-

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, it doesn't help.

Jamie Gaylon: ... not useful.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. Comparison, really not useful. Generalizable. I also was thinking too, that I know how you feel, a nice way to say that is sometimes like, "I know how I felt when, what is this like for you? How has this been for you?" And seek to understand what someone else's experience is. Maybe even within your own family, because their experience will be different, because their thoughts are different. So very good.

Just a couple of ways that we make feelings harder, I think most of them we've already covered, but to put them in one place. So, I like to call this on ourselves, which means whenever we tell ourselves we should be feeling differently than we are, or we should be doing something differently than we are, but should thinking or right or wrong thinking, there's a right way to feel a wrong way to feel. Just simply makes our experience of feelings

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harder. Definitely not useful to judge our progress by our feelings. It really just isn't, if we can just accept that all feelings are okay. And it might be five years from now, and all of a sudden, you're going to notice that little grief tsunami that you didn't expect. And there's no benefit to judging yourself for it because sometimes that's just the way of it.

Then of course, when we resist or avoid our feelings unintentionally, right? Sometimes I think it's okay to do it intentionally again, to take a break, but to do it time and time again, without intention doesn't usually serve us. Trying to appear strong, hiding our feelings, making happier the new goal. A lot of times I see this when we learned that our thoughts cause our feelings, and we just tell ourselves, "Oh, well, I'll just never think anything that doesn't make me feel happy again." And that's not the point of it, right? We're not trying to not have a human experience anymore. That's not helpful.

And then judging our feelings as wrong or inappropriate again, also not useful. And then assuming that death means we can't feel connected, threw this one in here at the last minute. But I just want to offer to you that connection is a feeling, and just like all the others, it's caused by our thoughts. So, we can always just through the way that we think feel connected to anyone. And I know a lot of us do this with people who are living without thinking about it. Maybe it's someone, you went to college with and they live across the country, and you don't talk to them very often. But when you think of them, you feel connected. It really doesn't have anything to do with how much time we spend with them, as much as it has to do with how we think about them.

And just to give an example from my life here, because it helped me so much and maybe it will help you. I was, Jamie has heard this story, we have a cabin in Colorado at Taylor Reservoir. And I was at the cabin. And it was a couple of years ago after Hugo had died, and he loved it there. And it was just his favorite place to be, just the Rockies in general.

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But so we were at the cabin, and my daughter and I were sitting in the main living room. We were looking outside at the mountains because it's right in the valley there. And I was telling her that I wished Hugo could be there with us. And she looked at me like teenagers look at their mothers sometimes, but she said, "Mama, he is here." And it was so matter of fact in her mind, that it hit me, that I was feeling completely disconnected to him. And here's my, I don't know at the time was she 14 maybe, she's feeling completely connected. And the only difference was that she was thinking that he was with us and I was thinking that he wasn't.

And so, I'm not saying you have to think that your person is with you. You can think whatever you want. But I want you to know that if you want to feel connected, that is available to you based on the way that you choose to think. Jamie, you want to add to that?

Jamie Gaylon: Yeah. You and I have talked about it before that I felt the same way. I felt like it's the difference between waiting to see the signs that he's still here versus the leaving he's still here. And then suddenly the signs are everywhere. And that when Eric passed, I spent a lot of time thinking, "I don't feel him here and I don't see him here. He's clearly not here." And as soon as I realized that that was within my control to think otherwise, and I started thinking, choosing to believe he was here. Then I saw him everywhere, in songs that played, in the sunsets.

I remember washing the dishes and seeing a sunset and feeling so overwhelmed with the feeling that he was right there. And the real difference was before I was asking my brain to look for all the evidence that he wasn't there. And instead I switched to asking my brain to find all the evidence that he is here. And it made all the difference in the world.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. Yep. Okay. Summary here a little bit, just to remember. So, feelings are not problems to be solved. They're experiences to be allowed. All of them are okay. None of them can hurt us or our children. If we can learn to allow them to just flow through us, we suffer less, and the feelings pass faster.

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And the goal is not to think happy thoughts or to feel more positive emotions and less negative emotions. The goal is just to embrace that emotions are part of our human experience and get better at allowing and processing them.

All right. With that, I will sign off and let Jamie, answer questions. If there's anything I can do to answer any questions later, I'm happy to do so. You can all email me at [krista@coachingwithkrista.com](mailto:krista@coachingwithkrista.com). And it's been a lot of fun. All right. Thank you.

Jamie Gaylon: Thank you.

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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.