

## Ep #96: When Boundaries Aren't Working



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

## Ep #96: When Boundaries Aren't Working

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 96, When Boundaries Aren't Working.

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.

So often, when I'm coaching widows about challenging relationships, they will tell me things like, "But setting boundaries just doesn't work with this person." Or, "They don't respect my boundaries and I don't know what to do about it." I wonder if this sounds familiar to you.

If you have people that you find challenging in your life and boundaries don't seem to be solving the problem, then this episode is for you. Because I'm going to teach you the number one reason boundaries don't work, and what to do about it so you never have another boundary problem again.

A little update on life in my world. It's kind of starting to get a little optimistic around here, COVID-wise. Boyfriend got his COVID vaccination on Saturday. My daughter got hers today. I'm not eligible yet. But I'm super-excited for the potential of being eligible in the near future and being able to travel again. Hopefully very soon things will start looking a little more normal.

Both of my kids are going to stay in online school until the end of the semester. They're enjoying it. It's working for them. So, even though schools are back in session, my kids are totally happy to be at home. and frankly, I like having them home. I work from home. Always have since I've been a life coach. And I love just having my son right next door to my office and my daughter's always camped out on the dining room table and I can see them and connect with them during the day.

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So, personally, I'll probably be sad when they actually go back to physical school buildings in the fall, if they do that. But that's what's going on in my neck of the woods. So, let's get into this episode, shall we? Let's talk about boundaries.

If you have not listened to episode 69, Put Down Your Manuals, I highly recommend that you listen to it as soon as you're done listening to this episode because the two concepts really do go side by side. Most often, when we think we're having a boundary issue, we're actually having a manual issue.

So, if you will go and listen to that episode, you will understand all about manuals and you'll see what I'm talking about. You can keep listening to this one and go check that episode out later, but don't forget because it will really help make this concept practical and tangible for you.

So, okay, here are some of the actual stories that I have heard from clients. "I keep telling them not to ask me about coming over to sort through my husband's belongings, and they keep bringing it up. Why don't they respect my boundaries?" Or, "I keep telling them, I don't want to date. And they keep offering to set me up with other people. And I just wish that they would honor my boundaries." Or, "I don't want them to ask me about whether I'm going to sell my house. I like my house. I don't want to move. Shouldn't they just respect my boundaries?"

And then my most recent favorite, which just happened this week, "They told me I don't need a life coach. I just need to strengthen my prayer life. Why don't they just respect my boundaries?"

I've heard some of these stories or variations on the theme so many times, to the point that it's kind of entertaining for me. People really do say lots of things to us, don't they?

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But what's happening here isn't really a boundary issue. What's happening in all of those situations is really just unsolicited advice. It's unwanted questions. If someone comes over to your house without your permission and starts going through your husband's belongings, that's a boundary violation.

If they send a date over to your house to pick you up, boundary violation. If they call a real estate agent and try to list your house, most definitely a boundary violation. When they're interfering with your own physical property. If someone tells you what color hair they think you should have, that's not a boundary violation. That's just unsolicited advice.

If they start putting a hair color on your hair, that is a definite boundary violation. So, we have to know the difference, and that is the number one reason boundaries don't work, is because we don't understand what a boundary violation is.

We're using boundaries to try to make people change, to try to make people stop giving us unsolicited advice, to stop asking us unwanted questions, to change their behavior because we think that we can't feel better until they change. And this is where boundaries get all messed up.

So, most often, what's really happening is not a boundary violation, it's a manual issue. And that's why I want you to go back to episode 69 and listen to Put Down Your Manuals. Just a quick little reader's digest, a manual issue is where we forget that our thoughts cause our feelings and we mistakenly think that someone else's behavior can make us feel any sort of way, can make us feel any sort of emotion.

Then, of course, we start trying to change the way the person is behaving. Because we think it's making us feel bad. That's a manual issue. That's when we have a set of expectations about how someone should behave so that we can feel good. And when they don't follow our manual, we start

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trying to make them follow our manual because we think it's the answer to our happiness. We think it's the answer to relieving all of this negative emotion that we don't want to experience.

And that's just when we've dropped out of emotional adulthood, we have forgotten that we're always in charge of our feelings with our thoughts. We get to choose which thoughts to believe. We get to choose which thoughts to entertain. We get to choose our thoughts on purpose. Other people can't control that for us.

We might have some old pattern thoughts show up in our brain about particular things in life. We might not consciously choose every thought that shows up in our mind because some of them are just patterns. But just because thoughts show up, doesn't mean we have to listen to them.

So, maybe you find that you have a repetitive story about someone in your life and you really want them to change. And that story is just so well-practiced. Maybe you've known them for years and maybe even before interacting with them, even just at the mere idea that you might interact with them, you notice that your feathers start getting a little ruffled, that the hackles on the back of your neck stand up, that you start getting a little dread before you even interact with them.

Sometimes that happens in relationships that we find challenging. It's just old patterns. That doesn't mean you can't choose to think about that person differently. But when you think you need a boundary to do that, you're just confused.

And this is not me being preachy. I've done this so many times and I still continue to do it and I'm always a work in progress. When we really want to set a boundary is when we are super-clear, when we know that we don't need this other person to change in order to feel better. That the reason we feel the way we feel is because of the way we're thinking, and we know

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we're always in charge of our thinking. And so, we know that this person doesn't need to change. And that's a great place to be, right? Because what are the odds of people changing just because you want them to?

In my world, it's not worked so well. And then, what does it have me doing? It has me spending a lot of time and energy trying to convince someone to behave the way I want them to behave, and it's really just the long way around. It's the long way around trying to feel better, is getting them to change so that then I can think how I want to think so I can feel how I want to feel.

It takes forever that way. Or, we could just realize that actually, this person's behavior isn't causing my feelings. They can ask me about whether I'm going to sell my house as many times as they want. And it doesn't have the power to make me upset.

They can tell me I don't need a life coach and I just need to check my prayer life as many times as they want. And I don't have to feel offended. I can decide to believe that they love me, that they mean the best for me, and that they're just trying to help me and it's not really causing any sort of emotional distress for me.

I can choose to see that in the way that I choose to see it. They don't have that power over me. Now, I also know that some of you who have not listened to episode 69 are also saying to yourself, "But Krista, won't that make me a doormat? Won't that mean that I just roll over and whatever anybody does to me or says to me, that I'll just take it and I won't assert myself or state my needs?"

And the answer to that question is no, it will not make you a doormat. When you step into full responsibility for your own emotional state, it will actually make you better able to advocate for yourself. I'm going to repeat that. It's worth repeating. When you step into full emotional adulthood, when you

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realize that nobody else has control over your emotional state but you, that is what makes you better able to advocate for yourself. That's what makes you less of a doormat. That's when you realize that other people don't need to change and then you can exercise your own choices. You can spend your energy on what you can control instead of on what you can't control, which is them and their behavior.

So, freedom here, as I see it, is you being fully responsible for your emotions. Now, I caution you, do not use this as a weapon against yourself. Do not tell yourself that you're not supposed to experience negative emotion or that you shouldn't be angry at people. That's not what I'm talking about.

And please, do not tell yourself that every response that you have to a situation is one that you consciously chose. Because it's also not. Sometimes – a couple examples from my own life. Lord help me if I watch a CPR scene. It's better now, but gosh, that used to be so upsetting to me.

I intellectually knew that it was a television show. But my brain went back to everything that I watched with Hugo. My nervous system, my brain, I was not consciously choosing those responses.

When I would see a car on the side of the road with a flat tire and the motorist assist people over there, or even worse, when I would see someone changing a tire on the side of a highway without motorist assist, I knew that I wasn't there, I knew that it wasn't my car. I knew there was a difference between me and the person in that situation. But my brain and my nervous system went back to a place where I was in danger.

And I had to do work on that. And there are resources out there that are available. Tapping is the one that helped me the most. EMDR is amazing for some people. So, I don't want you to be making it your fault that your

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brain and nervous system don't always respond in a way that you want. I don't want you to make it your fault that you feel triggered by things.

But I do want you to take responsibility for it in a way that empowers you. Because if you take responsibility for it, even if that means you go and find someone who can do EMDR, you go and find someone who can help you with tapping, you learn how to choose your thoughts on purpose. You learn how to support yourself when thoughts show up that you didn't ask for.

But you start putting your time and energy on you, on what's happening in your mind and in your nervous system. That is a good use of your time. If you're always looking for other people to change so that you can feel better, it's such a powerless place for you to be. And that's what most of us are doing when we think we're setting boundaries, is really we're trying to tell the person what we want them to do because we don't know how to feel better unless they change.

And then, we can't control them, and we don't do what we ask them to do. They don't follow our manual, and so we scream boundary violation when really it was just unsolicited advice. Really, it was just unwanted questions. It was them not changing their behavior. But no actual boundary was violated.

So, 99% of the time, I think that's what's happening. It's not really even a boundary violation. We're just confused and trying to get people to change so we can feel better. So, we've got to get really clear before we ever set a boundary that we are in full emotional adulthood on the issue, that we are recognizing, my emotional state is caused by my thoughts about this person's behavior and I'm the one in the driver's seat here. They do not have to change in order for me to feel better.

And when I get super-clear on that and if I get super-clear on that – and I'm going to promise you, I've coached on this so many times. Most of us think

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we're clear on it when we're not. So, again, you don't need to feel bad about it. But just know that most of us think we're clear on it when we're not.

But when we're clear on it, and then we still have a preference, then we can set a boundary. When we just have a preference – like listen, if you're going to text and drive and I'm the passenger in your car, I'm not going to take it personally. I don't need to be dramatic about it. I don't need to make it mean anything about me. I don't need to make it mean that you're a terrible person or I'm not good enough or any of this.

But here's what I will do. I will ask you to stop the car and I will get out. I will call an Uber. I'm not going to drive with you when you text while I'm with you. It's a boundary.

Most of the boundaries that we actually have don't even really require stating. Most of us have some boundaries, like it's not okay for someone to come into my house and do drugs. Not okay. But I don't really tell people in advance “Hey, I want you to know, I'm having a little gathering at my house, but I just want to make sure you know not to bring any drugs because that's not okay in my house.”

We don't usually have to say these things. We don't have to warn people in advance, “Hey, listen, I'm not okay with people hitting me, so I just want you to know that if we're going to be friends, you can't hit me.” We don't have to do that.

Very rarely do we actually even state a boundary. But if we're going to set a boundary, we really need to be prepared to follow through with it. and what that looks like is if you text while I'm in the car with you, I'm going to get out of the car at the next stop light. Maybe you're in a car with someone and they actually text while you're with them and you're not okay with that, and you tell them, “Hey, listen, if you do that again, I love you, maybe you say it

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or don't, I don't care, but what's going to happen is the next time we come to a stop light, I'm going to get out and I'm going to call an uber."

Or there's a boundary violation in your house. Maybe someone's doing drugs. "Hey, listen, I think I just saw some sort of paraphernalia, so I just want to make sure you know, I don't do that in my house. So, if that's something you want to do, you can't do it here. If I see you doing it again, I'm going to ask you to leave." That's a boundary that says, if you do this, what I will do is this.

And then, we have to be prepared to follow through. And maybe you do have some boundaries that are around things that are like what I mentioned in my examples. You could have a boundary. You could decide that, listen, somebody can ask you about selling your house as many times as they want until they're blue in the face and you really do realize it is not the cause of your emotional experience, and you're no longer going to entertain conversations where they do that. And you're going to get to the point where you say, "Hey, listen, I love you. But I don't want to talk about selling my house anymore. So, if you ask me that question again, I'm going to end the conversation."

But it's not about you needing them to change so you can feel better. "Hey, listen, I know you don't think I need a life coach and I know you think I just need to strengthen my prayer life, and I love you and I appreciate that you care about me. But if you keep talking about this life coach that I have hired and telling me I need to strengthen my prayer life, then I'm not going to have this conversation with you anymore because I'm pretty happy with my decision."

You don't need them to change so you can feel better. You know that no matter what they say, you are in charge of your emotional state. And you have a preference about how you choose to live your life. Do you see the difference? There's a big difference.

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One is you need to change and if you don't change I have to feel bad. The other is, I got me. I get to feel how I want to feel and you don't need to change. But if you keep doing this, here's how I am going to choose to respond because what I want matters. What I desire matters. My preferences matter.

Think about it like changing the channel on a radio station. So, let's say you just can't stand, I don't know, hard rock. You don't like it. If the radio station, you get in the car and you turn it on and it's on hard rock, you're probably not going to be upset about it. You're not going to think that hard rock causes your feelings. But you will change the channel because you just don't prefer hard rock.

Or maybe somebody gives you food in a restaurant and it's not what you ordered. You don't need to get mad at the wait staff and decide that you just can't be happy and they've ruined your evening. But you also don't need to eat the food that they brought you. You can also tell them to bring you the plate that you actually ordered. And maybe even you ask them to take it off your ticket if it takes long enough.

There's a difference between getting ourselves wrapped around the axel and making other people's behavior become a dramatic emotionally charged experience for us where we see ourselves as the victim and where our only way to feel better is to get them to change, and being cool, calm, and collected and realizing other people don't have that much power. We don't need them to change. But here's how we want to live life.

And if we set a boundary, we're prepared to follow through and the action that we're going to take isn't designed to manipulate. It's not designed to punish. It's just designed for us to live the life that we want to live. We don't want to have drugs in our house, we ask the person to leave, or we call the police.

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We don't want to be in the car with someone who texts and drives, we get out of the car. We're not manipulating. We're just living our lives the way that we want to because we can because it's our life, because we're adults and we can.

So, next time you think a boundary isn't working, I want you to get this episode out, listen to episode 69, Put Down Your Manuals, and ask yourself, do I really have a boundary issue here? Am I just trying to set a boundary so I can get another person to behave differently because I think it will make me feel better? If so, I'm probably giving them too much emotional power. I'm putting them and their behavior in charge of my emotions.

I have a manual and I'm confused and I'm thinking that they need to follow so I can be happy. But they aren't that powerful. I'm in charge of my happiness. I can create the emotional state that I want to create. And then, as a human on the planet whose desires and wants are worthy, then I can live my life the way that I want to. I don't have to be mad or upset with someone to follow through on a boundary that's important to me.

Okay? Okay. Listen, I'm not saying this is easy to implement. Inside of Mom Goes On, my group coaching program, we spend quite a bit of time working through our manuals and boundaries and issues related to challenging relationships.

Because frankly, I don't know really any widowed mom – I don't think that I know any that don't have challenging relationships. We all have them. And so often, they just seem to flair up when your partner dies. Maybe they were easier before and maybe they were the shield that kept that relationship a little bit distant from you or maybe the relationship challenges that you're having now are in some way related to their passing. But they just seem to show up and they're often what hold us back from loving life again.

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So, I get it. One podcast is not going to fix all your relationships. And if you want to do this work deeper, that's what I love doing more than anything on the planet, is helping you figure out what's in your way of loving life again and getting you to a place where you do feel empowered and you are creating your life on purpose and you're back to being you. And some of that is just working through challenging relationships.

So, I hope it was helpful, but again, I get it, one podcast won't fix it all. And I invite you, come on into the group if you want more help.

Alright, that's what I have for you this week. I love you. You've got this. Take care and I will see you next week. Bye-bye.

If you like what you've been hearing on this podcast and want to create a future you can truly get excited about, even after the loss of your spouse, I invite you to join my Mom Goes On coaching program. It's small group coaching just for widowed moms like you where I'll help you figure out what's holding you back and give you the tools and support you need so you can move forward with confidence.

Please don't settle for a new normal that's less than what you deserve. Go to [coachingwithkrista.com](http://coachingwithkrista.com) and click Work With Me for details and next steps. I can't wait to meet you.