

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Krista St-Germain

[The Widowed Mom Podcast](#)

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

Welcome to *The Widowed Mom Podcast*, episode 97, When It Was Suicide.

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.

Hey everyone. Welcome to another episode of the podcast. I've been thinking about bringing this subject to the podcast for a while and I think it's a really important one.

I'm really hoping that it's going to both provide insight and support for those who have lost someone to suicide. Also, I'm hoping that those of you who just want to learn more or are maybe interested in supporting someone who has lost someone to suicide will find this podcast valuable.

Before we get into it, I just want to give a shout-out to one of my Mom Goes On members. She knows who she is. I'm not going to call her out by name because she wants to remain anonymous. But she really warmed my heart recently and I think she is just such a shining example of good people really truly existing in the world.

She messaged me and she said, "Hey Krista, you know that woman that you coached on one of your free public calls," she said, "I've seen you coach her." And she told me her name. And she said, "I think your program would really help her and if you could find her, I'd like to pay for your program for her anonymously."

And I was able to find this woman and connect with her. She starts the program this month and I just am blown away by the goodness that exists in the world. And so you know who you are. I love you; I appreciate you, and I see you. So thank you for that.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

Okay, let's get into the topic at hand. So first, I haven't been through this experience personally. So what I'm sharing comes from the coaching that I've done with many widows who have lost their spouse to suicide and just my own personal research and interest in the subject.

And before I share my observations, I want us to be reminded that everyone's grief experience is different always. That's just a universal truth of grief. Everyone's grief experience is different. And because someone died by suicide doesn't mean that those who loved the person will have the same experience of grieving their loss either.

Every loss is different, every experience is different. Grief is always unique to the individual. So I'm using generalities in this podcast only because in this instance, I believe that generalities can be useful when they help normalize our experience, when they help us see that there's nothing wrong with us and that we didn't do anything wrong.

If it helps us create compassion for ourselves, for others, it makes acceptance easier, then generalities are useful in that regard. But please keep in mind that like most things in life, this is not a one size fits all experience.

So I'm going to tell you some of the trends that I see having coached a lot of widows who have lost their partner to suicide, and then I'm going to teach you the six most common myths that I see about suicide. Somebody else might have a different list and that's okay. I'm just going to share with you what I've learned in the time that I've been doing this work.

I wanted to give you some facts about suicide and so I went to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. And just to give a little baseline, this is what they had on their website currently at the time that I'm recording this. Now, it doesn't include 2020, so I don't really know the impact of COVID and the last year, the pandemic on the numbers.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

But in 2019, suicide was the 10th leading cause of death in the US. There were an estimated 1.38 million suicide attempts and 47,511 Americans died by suicide. This might surprise you because I think it surprises a lot of people. Does not surprise me based on the clients that I have worked with, but the rate of suicide is actually highest among middle aged white men.

I think a lot of people think that it's highest among teenagers. It's actually highest among middle aged white men. In 2019, men died by suicide 3.6 times more often than women. So white males accounted for nearly 70% of suicide deaths in 2019.

And in that same year, firearms accounted for more than 50% of all suicide deaths. So I just want to give you a little perspective in terms of the numbers. And I also want to offer a little bit about terminology. You will not hear me use the term commit suicide or committed suicide.

And that's because in modern US law, suicide is not a crime. Committing rape, committing murder, committing assault, those are crimes. So instead, I will use the term died by suicide. I also want to just give pause for a second to the terms successful suicide attempt and failed suicide attempt.

I just want you to think about those for a second. Not particularly sensitive and not particularly accurate, so I'm going to be avoiding those as well. Okay, stepping off my soapbox. What I've seen with loss by suicide is that the surviving partner often feels isolated, judged, abandoned, guilty, angry, and many other things.

But not only that, it's not just the pain of their loss, but it's usually a lot of suffering on top of the pain and it's also often a lot of stigma and judgment from even well-meaning people around them. Often the circumstances around the death were violent or add extra layers of difficulty for the living spouse to navigate.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

So intrusive thoughts and images, police investigations, having to identify the body. Many times the loss happens in the home where they lived, or maybe there was a traumatic period where the person was missing and had to be searched for. So PTSD is not uncommon and sometimes it goes untreated because they don't know that help is available or for whatever reason, they hold themselves back from reaching out and getting the help that is available.

I've seen the living partner go on fact finding missions in an attempt to understand why. I see that sometimes they hold themselves hostage from being able to accept what's happened, from being able to experience peace. Because they believe that they have to know why the person did what they did before they can rest and that's a bit like trying to put together a 1000-piece puzzle with 200 pieces and no box cover. It's like an impossible task.

I also see those around the griever not knowing how to respond. They just don't know. They will ask prying questions, they will make unhelpful assumptions, they sometimes blame the spouse or avoid the subject altogether, they pretend it never happened. Sometimes it is such a stigma in certain families and certain communities, they literally don't talk about it ever.

Sometimes people will use religion against the griever and make comments about the person's faith not being strong enough or telling them where they are and they're not in heaven or wherever the desired afterlife of that person's faith tradition states that they would be going to otherwise.

So if this is sounding familiar to you, I just want you to know that I see you. This may very well be the most challenging experience you ever go through in your life. I have no idea, I don't know what your life has in store for you, but I do know that everything I've just said is common and that you're not alone. And I really want you to know that, that you're not alone.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

So let me share with you the six myths that I frequently see around suicide. The ones I believe are the most troublesome for the women that I serve. So myth number one, if we're paying attention, we can always see suicide coming. Not necessarily.

Sometimes it happens and no matter how close we thought we were to the person; we could not have seen it coming. There's absolutely no benefit in telling yourself that you could or should have seen it coming. You couldn't. You didn't. That doesn't mean you weren't paying attention, that doesn't mean that you didn't care.

We can only see what people show us. And sometimes they play their cards very closely. Sometimes we just didn't see it, couldn't see it. So that's myth number one. If we're paying attention, we can always see suicide coming. No, not necessarily.

Myth number two, suicide is selfish. Now, it's okay to be angry with someone who died by suicide and it's okay not to be angry. However you're feeling, it's okay. Whatever you feel. Sometimes it's more comfortable for us as humans to be angry than it is to believe that bad things happen to good people, or to accept that we were truly powerless to control an outcome that we really want to control.

And so as common as it is to believe that a person was selfish, I want to offer that most people who die by suicide are not attempting to be selfish. They are suffering. And they don't know how to take the suffering away. It's more often about desperation. Not selfishness.

It's not because they don't care about those that they love. In fact, I think and have seen that sometimes people believe they are just so broken, so damaged, so unfixable beyond repair, they really believe that those that they love would be better off without them.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

And so it might not seem logical or rational to us, but to the person who's struggling, suicide might seem like the only logical and rational way out of their suffering. But it is not an act of selfishness.

Myth number three, suicide shows weakness. I disagree. Someone who dies by suicide is not looking to die. They are looking for a way to end their suffering. And that doesn't mean that they were weak. Doesn't mean anything in fact about who they were. It means absolutely nothing about their character.

It does not mean they were less worthy or less lovable or less valuable. It does not mean they weren't loved. It does not mean you didn't love them enough or try to help them. Doesn't mean they were raised in an abusive home or neglected; it doesn't mean their parents didn't love them. Doesn't mean there was anything wrong with them at all.

It doesn't mean they were unfaithful to their religion or to their god. We make it mean so many things. It doesn't. Doesn't mean they were damaged; doesn't mean they were less than. What it means is that they were suffering, they were struggling, and they couldn't find any other way out of the struggle. That's what it means.

Myth number four, suicide means mental illness. Sometimes yes, sometimes no. And I looked for statistics on this so I could quote them to you and I found mixed results. One I found that I liked came from the CDC and it suggested that about 54% of those who die by suicide have a diagnosed mental illness.

We don't need to label it mental illness to make peace with it and that's what I see a lot of us doing is withholding peace from ourselves in the absence of a mental health diagnosis. And it's unnecessary.

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

And also, the truth is that we don't know what was going on in their mind. We weren't that person. We genuinely don't know. And sometimes the answer to our suffering is to decide that it's okay to not understand.

To choose to believe that the person was doing the best they could do with what they knew, that they weren't trying to mess up your life or abandon you or put their desires above yours or leave you with a mess, that they were waking up every day trying not to suck at life, just like the rest of us, and this was their answer to the suffering that they didn't know how to solve, mental illness or no mental illness. And trying to figure out why now is a lot like trying to put 1000-piece puzzle together with 200 pieces. And no box cover. It's almost impossible.

Myth number five, the way they died means they're less worthy or respectable. The value of a person and the value of their life has nothing to do with the way that they died. The way they died, it just does not define them. We don't do this with accidents, we don't do this with cancer. Why do we do it with suicide?

Last myth, myth number six, their partner must have had something to do with it. And sadly, I hear this from a lot of widows that I work with. Their spouse's family, their spouse's friends, even sometimes their own friends look to them for answers and may blame them for the death. Maybe even their children are blaming them.

Especially if it was perceived by others that the relationship was challenging. Maybe there was fighting in public or a recent split, or maybe a divorce was in work, or a history of abuse. There could be lots of types of things happening.

But it's very common that the widows I have coached will get blamed. And so if this is happening to you, I just want you to know those people who are blaming you, they may never change their minds. It may always be easier

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

for them to blame you than to accept what has happened, to accept that their loved one could have made that choice on their own.

And so they blame you because it's easier. It feels better to them to have a point at which to focus all of this terrible emotion that they're feeling. And what matters is not that they stop blaming you, but that you learn to be your own champion here. That you don't take on their blame, that you are compassionate with yourself because you cannot control other people's opinions any more than you can change the past.

And all the energy you spend trying will only exhaust you at a time when taking care of yourself needs to be a top priority. So I'm not saying they're right by blaming you but I'm saying that if you're thinking you can't be okay until they stop blaming you, that isn't true. You have to learn to be your own champion here. You can't take it on.

In summary, most frequent myths that I see around suicide, number one, if we're paying attention, we can always see suicide coming. Not necessarily. Number two, suicide is selfish, absolutely disagree. Number three, suicide shows weakness. Nope. Says nothing about a person's strength. Number four, suicide means mental illness. Nope. Maybe about half the time, statistics vary.

Number five, the way that a person dies means that they're less worthy or respectable, death by suicide equals less worthiness or less respectableness. No. Completely disagree. Not at all. Full stop. And number six, their partner must have had something to do with it. No, no, and no.

This is what I see. If this is sounding familiar to you, again, I cannot take away your pain. But my hope is at least I can help with some of the suffering. At least you will feel heard, you will know that you are not alone, you will see that these are common struggles for other women who have

Ep #97: When It Was Suicide

lost their spouse to suicide, and you will find a little comfort in knowing that you just aren't alone and that you're seen. Even if I never talk to you, I see you. I see you.

Alright, that's what I have for you this week. I hope you have an amazing week. Remember, I love you and you've got this. Take care and I'll see you next time. Bye-bye.

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

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